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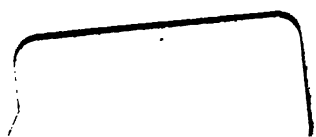
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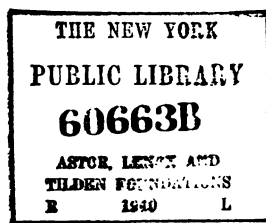
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THE PRINCESS

RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE







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A CAPTIVE PRINCESS.

BOOK I.

"THE CASTLE DANGEROUS."

CHAPTER I.

A WOMAN'S KINGDOM.

Countess von Dornberg sighed wearily as she turned her eyes away from the gray waste of waters spread out before her. A treacherous leaden mist was now stealing over from the Esthonian shore, and as yet no gleam of silver sail had rewarded her hour's vigil. The clang of her silver bell then echoed loudly in the great, lonely drawing-room.

The Lady of the Isles gazed inquiringly at old Elia, her butler, whose wrinkled face was as yellow as the buff facings of his faded blue livery.

"You have seen nothing? The mail boat should be even now nearing the island."

"Nothing as yet, Barina," piped the aged serving-man. "It is the old thing—the currents, the winds, even the witches and nixies, fight against us here!"

"The young ladies?" calmly continued Marie von Dornberg, ignoring the old Russian's superstitious babble, for, like the brook, Elia went on forever.

"They are out riding," said Elia, approaching the deep-set windows whose double sashes bespoke the inclemency of a Baltic winter.

"There is the boat coming now. It is just passing the island."

His mistress gazed out over her emerald lawns, whose bordering trees were just faintly colored with the first blossoms of early May.

"Bring me my mantle. I will walk down to the Point," she said, as a new light came into her eyes. "There may be letters from Max."

The stately woman, who was the sovereign ruler of eight hundred simple Esthonian islanders, paused before the portrait of a stalwart, fair-haired man, upon whose breast the artist had proudly depicted the medals and crosses which a crafty Romanoff had once showered upon the dead Adolf von Dornberg.

"Father and son," she murmured. "Max will be the same headlong, obstinate character. '*Il ira loin*,'" she sighed.

And as she left the room, her lip curled as she noted the perfunctory exhibition of an official loyalty in the superbly framed engravings of the Czar Alexander II., and the aged Czarina, whose heart was already throbbing in a bitter jealousy of the sweet-faced Dolgorouki. For the deserted Maria of Darmstadt was breaking her heart in the loneliness of the Winter Palace, and murmuring with white lips, "She shines me down."

"They will never make Russians of us at heart," mused Countess Marie, whose keen glances had fallen scornfully upon the silver icons gleaming in the corners of the luxurious salon. "The old Swedish blood, the stubborn Lutheran faith, are still proof against Muscovite bureaucracy and official orthodoxy!"

With a conscious pride, the Lady of the Manor passed the old stone walls behind which, in the days gone by, Esthonian, Dane, Swede, and Pole had rallied in turn to stem the tide of the invaders bearing the blue and white St. Andrew's cross.

It was a woman's kingdom, this little island of Worms, with its forty square miles of wooded hills, of bleak promontories, and wind and wave swept shores.

Cut off from the Esthonian shores by dangerous channels, and fenced with blinding fogs and violent currents, the lonely island seldom was trodden by a stranger's foot.

Marie von Dornberg sought out her favorite seat, in an old ruined watch-station. To the west, the sun was



still gilding the waves, and a far-off smoke marked the slow passage of a Riga-bound steamer.

The lonely woman's heart leaped up as her eyes fell upon the kindred shores of Dago to the south; with far-away Oesel (her birthplace) a blue distant vision, its peaks flecked with glints of the sunset gold.

A noble and stately figure was Marie von Dornberg as her eyes sought the "bluest of the isles" whence Count Adolf von Dornberg had borne away his girlish bride, the last of the von Ehrensteins.

In this year of trouble and unrest, eighteen hundred and seventy-nine, the vague political commotion which agitated all Russia had stirred up even the sluggish Finland and the quiet Baltic Provinces.

And now, all Courland, Livonia, Esthonia, and old Ingria were trembling under the quest which the fierce-hearted Tolstoy had instituted years before. It was true that the drag-net of "seventy-five," yielding nearly two hundred "suspect" victims, had spared these Baltic Provinces.

But a woman whose ancestors had fought in the knightly ring of the Yellow Brigade around Gustavus Adolphus at Lutzen—an heiress born to all the proud traditions of the von Ehrensteins—had brought away from her native Arensburg all the stern pride of the unconquered Livonian nobility. She reigned untrammelled.

The very winds of heaven chanted freedom around her, and her girlish mind had been fascinated with the legends of those brave Esthonian islanders who died around their idols.

Since the year twelve hundred, the gleaming waters spread out below her had borne the war flags of Dane, German, the lion-hearted Swede, and the all-conquering Russian, that victorious Slav-Cain who had slain his Polish brother Abel.

Rurik, the Varangian, with his "Ruotsen" had given an alien name to the mighty composite nation which found its foreign chief among the hardy "rowers" of the icy north, the fierce men who tamed the bold Normans, bearded the hardy Dane, overran merry England, and burst the seal of silent ages, crossing the trackless Atlantic to far Vineland, in Saint Brendan's shadowy pathway.

And now, mistress for life of her little island kingdom, Marie von Dornberg waited for her only son, Max, to come back to his birthplace and view the "pent-up Ithaca" of the diminished holdings of the von Dornbergs and von Ehrensteins. It was the only independent holding left on the conquered Baltic shores!

Around her all was storm and sunshine mingled, for a gray fog in the east was driven onward by rising gales and a fierce slanting rain. Before its fitful impulse the mail boat was driving swiftly on toward the little landing below her.

"It is the icy breath of Russia," she murmured, her heart stirred with the local pride of birth which mingled the gallant traditions of Pole, Dane, German, and Swede, who had stoutly held these dangerous marches of the frontier land until Peter the Ice King at last dragged down the fiery Charles XII. at fatal Pultowa.

Marie von Dornberg forgot her long years of widowhood in her lonely vigil here on the Esthonian shore as she turned her eyes away to the south and west. Her mind reverted once more to her winter home at sunny Cap St. Martin, and her son's long world-wanderings of the last three years came back to her. A dangerous exile!

"I was foolish to bid him come back here now. It is a time of storm and stress. Perhaps he will linger at Paris. His letters may tell me of some new whim. A boy's will is as the wind's will."

Shading her eyes with her white hand, she gazed down over the wooded slopes in search of the truant riders, and saw where the still far-off boat was struggling now against the adverse shore currents.

"It may be hours yet," she murmured, as she gazed out to the west in the golden glory of the dying day. "He must come here and learn to know his people."

"There is Nadine, too, waiting, as fond women wait, and even Zenaide wonders what manner of man the last of the von Dornbergs may be! He must learn to be a man among men. The nobles of the Baltic Provinces all yearn to see his father's son. And—the outcome of it all?"

She leaned her head upon her jewelled hand and marked the silent surf rolling on the western beach be-

low, the blue expanse of ocean beyond tinted with golden gleams.

She was still a beautiful woman at forty-three, this daughter of an old Swedish warrior line. Tall and stately, with steady blue eyes and tawny hair, her suzerainty had given her a majestic mien.

As she gazed out into the west there came back to her those happy days of life's spring, when, a bride at seventeen, she had landed upon the island, where the sturdy Swedish colonists had welcomed her as a golden-haired Aslauga.

For her, the chivalrous Adolf von Dornberg had builded the wonder of those days, the great, irregular modern château lying below her there on the knoll where the Esthonian idolators had made their last desperate stand.

Her island kingdom had seen the fairy creations of Aladdin's lamp under the touch of love.

The golden sun-lances splintered upon the western windows of the massive two-story stone edifice, with its rugged outlines bravely suggesting a defiance to the death.

In truth, the half-story buttresses below, the overhanging bay-windows above, the watch towers on the corners, the massive gateways and high loopholed encircling walls, gave to Château Dornberg the air of a proud old feudal stronghold.

The modern environment of the ancient Esthonian castle had left all the earlier buildings intact, and a cosmopolitan Russian luxury had gilded the bower where the three crowns and falcon of the von Dornbergs now fluttered from the tall flagstaff of the brave old vantage-place.

It had been a lonely kingdom—this patrimonial island—and yet, the steadfast woman loved the sea-girt realm; for the blue waves barred off the Russian "tchinovik."

The Viking's daughter had long ruled the simple islanders in her own grand fashion. She knew the stubborn pride of the rugged peasantry who toilsomely reaped the harvest of the sea and dressed their sandy fields in peace. The warring winds and fanged rocks, the defiant currents and clouding fogs, guarded lonely

Worms from the swarm of Russian officials now "nationalizing" the whole Baltic Provinces and carrying out the will of the Slavophil schemer Samarin.

True, the untiring Muscovite propagandist, at last worn out, slept in alien soil at Berlin, but his cult had lived on after him. It was Kismet! The haughty Finlanders had conserved the autonomy even in the wreck of the great *Guerre du Nord*, and the adroit Peter, greater than even his flatterers dared to proclaim, trusted to time and Russian seduction to overcome the social aversion of the stern Finland nobles.

But, to-day, Marie von Dornberg knew that the whole Baltic provinces were gradually coming under the yoke. Yet Arensburg, Riga, Dorpat, Wenden, and Revel still boasted the privileges of the *Tête-Noires*, and the descendants of the *Porte Glaives* and Teutonic Knights held socially aloof from the hated Russ.

For all the resistant pride of the banded nobles of Poland's old sea frontier, her eyes to-day saw only the blue and white cross on sloop and shallop, near the strand, and on the steamers and warships far out to the west.

"Every wind that blows bears the Russian banner on," she murmured, and her pride of birth sadly called back the hopeless struggles on these Baltic shores since that proud mitred warrior, Albert of Riga, founded the *Porte Glaives* of Wenden, and so, paved the way for the stately Teutonic Knights.

Since the year twelve hundred the simple Letts and Esthonians had been lashed into a submissive Christianity by Pole and German, Dane and Swede, fanatic Hungarian, and even Henry IV. of England, at the head of three hundred mailed knights, had couched his murderous lance, in the name of the peaceful Christ, here on these sandy, pine-fringed shores.

She dreamed over the splendid days of the warrior-priests who had tamed the marches and held their fantastic revels in their fortified castles of Revel, Riga, Arensburg, Hapsal, and Dorpat, and had even ruled the whole of Ingria. A mighty clan of soldier-monks!

But, when that military madman, Charles XII., threw away the great holdings of Sweden on the Eastern Baltic—the hard-won crown jewels of great Gustavus—

there rose up the baleful star of the North, gleaming high in the ice-chilled blue heavens, and, before Peter the Great, all else went down!

Too well the Lady of the Isles knew that Russia's iron grip never loosens, and, the lonely daughter of a Swedish royal strain, she knew that her son would find no life career under the banner of the pitiless Romanoffs. He was an alien by blood, education, and social antipathy to the Russ.

For the blood of the von Dornbergs and the von Ehrensteins was but a hallowed proscription.

There remained now nothing of the glorious fabric of the conquering Swedes but the racial loyalty of her Lutheran Swedish colonists and the grudgingly given privileges of the blue-blooded nobles of the Baltic shores. The mailed hand of Russia had swept away all but the romance of the old.

The only thing free around her was the tameless ocean, throbbing in its restless runes at the sea-gates of that island kingdom whence Love had fled away, chilled by Time and man's varying moods.

"If Russia were to grasp Norway and Sweden, as it surely will some day, then Max, Count von Dornberg, might have a career," she sighed; "for the mantle of an olden greatness wraps him in shrouding folds! Ah, the will of Peter, and Catherine's dreams of the future only need time to work out all their craftily plotted scheme of empire! It will be too late for Max!"

Her eyes rested upon the gleaming marble tomb rising under the gloomy, sighing pines, where Adolf von Dornberg had found the peaceful rest which he never knew in life.

"His father's son must some day know all—but, not yet!" she sadly murmured.

It was a strange and tragic story—the storm-tossed life of Count Adolf.

With an impatient glance at the forest road hiding her truant riders, and a survey of the distant struggling boat, she rose—her feet following loving memories of a happier past—and went down to the western shore of a little indented bay.

By a great rock, where Count Adolf had often led her in their days of young love, she gazed out upon all

the splendid panorama of the sun now sinking in the golden, gleaming sea.

The five months of fierce-hearted summer were coming on, when reluctant day lingered till midnight on these silent shores, awakened to a throbbing life by the kisses of the goddess, with glowing bosom—the Summer Queen.

There came back to her, now, Heine's exquisite lines,

"Das Meer erglänzte weit hinaus."

Her bosom heaved with a storm of reawakened love as she lived over the last hour when Adolf had led her to this lonely spot to tell her of a foreign mission of distinction conferred upon him by the Czar. It had been a last characteristic touch of Muscovite duplicity—"The Greeks bearing gifts."

For the separatist policy of Alexander II. had artfully given an honorable exile to Count Adolf von Dornberg, then hailed in the flush of his manhood as the political leader of the banded alien nobility of the Baltic Provinces. And, all organized resistance had died out with his departure.

It had led on to his death. There was a sad story, an untold tale, of which her foreign-bred son was even now ignorant. The wine of Life stirred in Adolf's bosom. In the wild abandon of the life of the lower Danube, he had been adroitly "exploited" by the wily Russian secret agents.

There were women there with hearts of fire and eyes of flame—the reckless daughters of the beautiful blue Danube. The pace had been a hot one.

The influence of the stately Aslauga ruling on the misty Baltic had soon weakened.

There was a social imbroglio, an intrigue, a quarrel in the bowers of the rosy Mænads, the inevitable duel, and then

*"A distant and a lonely shore
Hid Leyden's cold remains."*

A crimson flush dyed the fair woman's cheeks as she called back, with a gasp of outraged pride, how one high in Russian authority had dared to bring to her feet the offer of his pent-up passion.

She knew from him all the dark secret of that honor-

able exile. For Marie von Dornberg, high-souled and fearless, had been her headlong husband's good angel. A rosy bribe of protected court preferment, with the sweets of a secret reign over him who ruled the frontier, had been offered her, but it was a poisoned cup!

In return for her secret adherence to the governmental policy, the Lady of the Isles was to see her son rapidly advanced in the honorable gilded captivity of the Guards, and, later, to shine as the "very rose and expectancy of the fair state" on these historic shores.

Her answer had been one which sent the tempter away, black-browed and scowling, yet humbled and tongue-tied! Her son—the Lord of the Isles—in far-away Heidelberg had finished his education, freed from Russian influences, and her own winters had been passed in the International Paradise of the Riviera. She had fled temptation and so, foiled her enemies.

But the ruler of the woman's kingdom was now unhappy at heart.

"Her son!" Almost a stranger to her, he had spent the last three years in world-wandering, and his ample paternal fortune, with his noble status, made him an easy target for the adventuress, a possible victim of Russian seduction, and perhaps, the wild Berserker blood of the father might bring a second tragedy into the dark family annals.

"It is a hard world," she sighed. "Anything but St. Petersburg," was her inward prayer; for too well she knew the wiles of the white-bosomed phalanx of the Russian throne.

Only the serpentine Polish woman, with her soft, swelling throat and ophidian eyes, can meet and vanquish the hot-hearted Muscovite dames who do battle for the Czar behind their silken armor. A rosy and a reckless band!

Marie von Dornberg trembled as she felt in her heart that the home-coming son was almost a stranger to her! And all her woman heart then rose up in one last proud resolve: "I will fence him in with the one pure love of this world—a mother's! I will watch him—fight for him! He shall learn to rule these isles in loyalty to his creed—his ancestry, and all the memories of a glorious past! Let him come! It is best!"

And yet, seated there alone, she wondered if she had been wise to rear her son out of the Russian dominions. It came to her suddenly that she knew nothing of his Parisian life, of his associates, of his real inner nature.

Free at twenty-one, Count Max von Dornberg had enjoyed his own fortune, and, at twenty-four, he was now as headlong as the father who had succumbed to the fascinations of the Delilahs of the Dobrudsha.

"He must take up his own life now," sighed Countess Marie. "The battle is on, and soldiers are only made by fighting."

Madame von Dornberg despaired of handing over her hard-won experience to the brilliant Heidelberg student.

"Life can not be lived at second hand," she mused. "I dare not tell him all his father's weaknesses, and there are chapters of my own lonely history which he must not know." She was now a steeled woman of the world. She had long watched the winter Passion Play of the Riviera, and, strong and silent, had avoided all the snares which had been adroitly set for her.

"*Château qui parle se rend toujours*," had been her proverbial guide. Her motto, "*Loyal toujours*," held her still faithful to the memory of the man whom she had loved in the springtime of her life.

For Adolf von Dornberg had never fallen away from her side. It was only in absence that he fell. The old sorrow was buried in her heart, for the glamour of the happy days was upon her now.

She was living in the happy past, her unravished treasure of the years of love, as she saw once more her gallant husband at her side.

It was here that they had tasted of the sweetest cup of Life, Love's elixir, held in Youth's outstretched, eager hands.

"Far, far away the ocean shone
As the last sunbeams fled;
Beside the fisher's cabin lone,
Alone, we two were seated."

The words of the mocking German genius died upon her lips, for, at the crest of the hill, two glowing amazons merrily hailed her as their captive.

"There is Nadine and Princess Aida! Max will

surely find my island kingdom brightened by them. And he shall so be fairy guided to Hapsal's happy shores." She sprang up and soon joined them.

The groom led away Nadine Valdor's gallant gray and Zenaide's coal-black Orloff with the silver star, while the companions threaded the garden's mazes, bringing home the Lady of the Isles.

The silver gong was already sounding for dinner, and old Elia's solemn face gleamed yellow behind the mistress's chair, before Nadine, Baroness Valdor, and her *alter ego*, Princess Zenaide, could judge of the contents of the first letter opened with trembling hands by the Countess when the mail-bag was deposited upon Madame von Dornberg's escritoire.

"Is it good news, Maman?" eagerly cried her ward, Nadine. There was a sober seriousness in Marie von Dornberg's measured reply.

"Max comes back on the 'Constantine's' next trip. And brings a guest with him. The Ritter Karl von Geist! A German scholar deeply interested in our border lore."

A feeling of sadness and unrest had crept into the mother's heart. "He brings a stranger home to us," she murmured.

"Zenaide, you are a witch!" gayly cried Nadine. "Your fortune-telling is coming true."

The fair Circassian girl bowed her head in a pretended day-dream.

"The stranger will come, and he will stay," she slowly replied. "The stars tell me their secrets, and I can see him now. He has been here before—no stranger to this land."

It had been a strange fortune which had led a girl born under the tents of Schamyl to the splendors of the Catherine Institute—a little captive Princess, whose childish ears had listened in wonder to the thunder of the Russian cannon echoing around Aul Gounib. A weird mystery wrapped the personality of Princess Zenaide, whose proud family name was lost in the dispersion of Schamyl's bleeding and dying followers.

A fair-haired beauty of twenty, the disdainful young eaglet chafed under the gilded chains of a Russian pension and the future glittering career of a maid of honor of a future Czarina.

Homeless, save for the Czar's splendid bounty, the graceful mountaineer had quickly enslaved Nadine Valdor, her junior by two years.

They were both orphans, for, beyond General Drag-onoff, the co-trustee with the Lady of the Isles, Nadine Valdor was alone in the world. The heiress to an enormous estate was in the first year of her twelve years' sojourn at the old Smolnyi Monastyr when the Turcoman sabres had ended General Valdor's life. And here she had found a shelter.

Love had led her into Marie von Dornberg's arms, for the chivalric Baron Valdor had never forgotten the love which he had secretly cherished for the beauty of Arensburg.

And so, he had named the woman whose rank had held her far above him in youth, to be the guardian of his motherless daughter. It was a sweet legacy—this orphan's stainless youth!

So Nadine's vacation visits brought happy laughter into the silent halls of Château Dornberg, for already Max had departed for the German training preparatory to his Heidelberg days, when she began to grow up into womanhood.

"Child—child no more," was the comment of the Lady of the Isles, as she gazed upon the White Rose of Hapsal, for so the graceful girl was already known.

There had been a community of feeling between the two orphans from their first meeting on the Perspective de Liteiny, and the daring Circassian captive proudly defended her brown-eyed darling from the audacious young Russian tyrants of the *haute noblesse*.

Never a Narychkine or Soltykoff of them all, who dared to brave the imperious captive Princess. The last taunt of her nameless rank fell upon deaf ears, as Zenaïde threw down the gauntlet for "*la petite Valdor*."

The ceremonial dinner was over, and Princess Aïda was gazing out upon the lights of a passing ship far out on the Baltic, as Nadine Valdor listened to the letter in which her long-expected Prince Charming announced his return.

But even her guileless heart knew that some shadow of disappointment already clouded the heir's return.

She was a vision of delight, this bright-faced girl

with the tender brown eyes, as she leaned her graceful head upon a blue-veined hand.

Her brown hair was clustered over an exquisite face whose blushes were of Life's ambrosial spring.

Noble, serene, and tender, her voice thrilling low and sweet as the forest winds, Nadine Valdor's eyes glistened with a happy light as she listened to the reading of the unsatisfactory letter which had so strangely disturbed the Lady of the Isles.

There was a ringing laugh when Countess Marie read the few lines in which the last of the von Dornbergs referred to the pale-faced child whom he had seen but once in his ante-Heidelberg days.

"And, Nadine's school-days being over, I presume there will soon be sighing gallants crossing your misty waters. I can hardly fancy the result of the Catherine Institute's social drill upon the little one, all knees and elbows, whom I can scarcely remember."

"Aida! You have forgotten your own letter! It is from Alixe Bellegarde," cried Nadine, as her cheeks crimsoned under Countess Marie's searching glances. The crest of the Lords of Hapsal were the sure indication of the weekly budget of gossip from the queen of the Esthonian rosebuds.

"There will be cavaliers in plenty soon, Mignonne," carelessly answered the Circassian, when her rapidly darted glances had devoured the four crossed pages.

"And you will soon see your future Czar, for the Grand Duke Alexander Alexandrovitch will now bring the beautiful Dagmar and her children to Hapsal! There is a Grand Comité d'Honneur already named.

"You will surely see your bold admirer, Fedor Lazareff, again, for, as Marechal de Noblesse, he will be the 'Arbiter elegantiarum.'"

"And, of course, the Bellegardes will give the culminating Fête d'Été; there will be the Grand Yacht Club ball in August! So you will see the mighty Czarevitch at last! You are a loyal Russian, and you will be happy!"

The Circassian's eyes were flashing in a haughty scorn. The Countess gazed upon her in surprise. "He is your sovereign's son, Zenaïde," she gravely commented.

"I am only a prisoner, a despoiled orphan!" cried Aida. "There is no man to whom I bend the knee. My fathers died, sword in hand, under the shadows of Kasbeck! The Russians are dogs, and our horses' hoofs have been wet with their heart's blood!"

"Beautiful Dagmar, I will kiss her gentle hand! But I must once breathe the air of Circassia's glorious mountains and drink in the elixir of freedom! I will never begin to live till these golden shackles are broken!"

Marie von Dornberg and Nadine silently watched her as she swiftly strode away, with all the savage grace of her wild blood, and, as they talked in low tones of the home-coming, from a distant music-room the chords of a piano breathed out the fitful gusts of the stormy passions of the dauntless social rebel.

A sense of impending trouble weighed down the heart of the châtelaine, who was chilled by the untimely visit of this unknown social quantity, Karl von Geist.

It was the hour of ten when black-browed Olga Luboff silently seated herself before the samovar. A cloud seemed to have drifted over the social horizon of Château Dornberg, and Fedor Lazareff's name had called up memories of an already boldly impertinent suitor for the heiress of the gallant Valdor.

"Princess Zenaïde," gravely demanded the Lady of the Isles.

"She has gone to the Tower, Madame la Comtesse, and begs your kind indulgence," replied the stubborn-looking Russian *demoiselle de compagnie* of the absent daughter of the unconquered Tcherkess.

"All must be bright for Max's home-coming, Duischka!" fondly said the mother, as she kissed her nestling a fond good-night. "You will both go over and receive him. The Intendant will accompany you."

Left alone, the Countess pondered long upon her son's letter, with its reserved sections. "It looks like a shield 'twixt him and me—the advent of this stranger, Von Geist. A German noble—a man of the world—perhaps an intriguer!"

Her brow darkened. "Here are two beautiful girls—and Fedor Lazareff, too, as the Master of the Revels! Would to God that Max had come to us alone!"

CHAPTER II.

“WILL YOU KEEP MY SECRET?”

There was an anxious group gathered at the end of the long jetty at Hapsal, four days later, as the stout old steamer “Constantine” came cautiously feeling her way in from the west, past sand-spit and dangerous reef. The declining sun lit up the two great customs warehouses, and a gentle breeze idly moved the pennants of a dozen schooners and shallops now rocking gayly on the swirling waters of the high tide.

The low, sandy, pine-fringed shores of Hapsal curved away northward toward Spint Head, and far to the south the heavier forests of Parallup led away to Bol Sound, while the shimmering azure waters to the west concealed the outlying islands of Worms, Dago, Oesel, and Mohn. It was a delightful shore, a placid and slumbering sea.

Over the fringing primeval oaks to the east the gray walls of Schloss Hapsal rose, surmounted with a tottering chimney and brave with a stern, round tower, capped with its Norman turret.

The Angelus sounded softly on the tranquil evening air, and the sunlight gleamed upon the golden cross of the cathedral, at whose altars the sacrifice of the Mass had been celebrated for nearly eight hundred years.

Two centuries of war and dissension had scourged these Esthonian woods, and even the great bell had been recast from its broken metal when it came crashing down in the “great fire,” when the awful voice from the heavens cried “Beware, Hapsal!”

The square tower of the gray Lutheran church and the polished copper domes of the modern orthodox temple told of the triune schism of the warring Oestlanders, Swedes, Danes, Germans, and Muscovites—Christian brothers living in bitter opposition.

But the subtle spirit of magic summer was now moving in the breast of man and maid. There were already graceful forms seen upon the Esplanade. The cheery sailors’ song echoed musically over the waters as they toiled, furbishing up the pleasure fleet.

Bursting bud and fragrant blossom marked the line of the "Stille Promenade," forever dear to the lingering lovers, and the music of a military band floated out over the placid cove from the great white mansion on the Point, soon to be the summer palace of the bewitching Dagmar, the Sea King's daughter.

Through the low trees, the summer villas gleamed, and an unwonted bustle marked the tortuous streets of Hapsal, where three thousand dwellers now ardently longed for the semi-imperial court of the beloved Czarewitch, the giant heir of the Autocrat of All the Russias.

The telegraph had told of the coming of the Grand Duke's official forerunners. By rail from St. Petersburg to Reval and Baltischport, a gay detachment of uniformed officials were now hastening to make ready for the heir of Peter's throne. The splendors of the Imperial throne were to gild Hapsal's happy shores.

And so, there were already plenteous samples of the diverse Russian uniforms in the crowd at the end of the quay.

Handsome, burly Colonel Ivan Gorski, the Chief of Police, smoothed his whiskers à la Nicholas and inflated his bemedalled chest as he noted the ladies clustering around the officials gathered on the upper deck of the "Constantine."

Moujiks, fishermen, isvostchik drivers, beggars, and stolid-faced soldiers sullenly eyed the cavaliers clustered now around Baroness Nadine Valdor and the tall, defiant Tcherkess, Princess Zenaide.

Groups of old women and children offered early flowers, while an impromptu market was noisy with chaffering over the splendid fishes of the Baltic. It was a noisy and an animated scene.

As the six-hundred-ton steamer crept slowly up to the wharf a rattling salute of two éprouvette cannons rang out from Countess von Dornberg's schooner-yacht, now awaiting the orders of her truant son, Max.

The three crowns and falcon flag proudly fluttered at the yacht's mizzen-peak.

There was a truly Russian chorus of chattering welcome as the gang-plank was run out. The first man to leap ashore was a stalwart six-footer, whose eager blue eyes were filled with wonderment as Nadine Valdor,

holding out two daintily gloved hands, came forward to meet the last of the Dornbergs. A Hebe of glowing loveliness!

"Welcome home! Maman sends hearty greetings," was the merry breaking of the wanderer's spell of amazement.

Standing there, hat in hand, Max von Dornberg surveyed the vision of beauty with glowing eyes until he found his speech once more.

"And so, this is little Nadine," he dreamily said. "Impossible!"

"I must ask Zenaide, then, to prove my identity," laughed the White Rose of Hapsal, as she presented the Count to the Diana-like Circassian.

"Count Max von Dornberg," the maiden soberly said, "now you are under our Oestland enchantment, you shall learn to know your own realm before you wander the world again!"

Her eyes had drooped under the glances of the young noble standing there with his fair hair blown back by the western wind—a noble and a martial figure.

Her face paled slightly as a lithe young Russian gallant, bowing deeply, offered her a cluster of the first roses of the year.

"Do you stay with us, Baroness, or vanish again into cloudland?" was the easy greeting of the leader of the Esthonian noblesse.

Nadine turned to Max with a grateful sense of a new protection. "My brother, Count Max von Dornberg, Prince Fedor Lazareff," she gravely said.

The eyes of the two young men met as they stiffly bowed. And between them, then and there, the spirit of undying hatred was born.

"I shall conduct my sister at once to Château Dornberg," said Max, astonished at the evident familiarity of the thin-lipped Russian, whose piercing black eyes were now roving over the debarking crowd. "Where is your friend?" whispered Nadine.

"Ah! I forgot! How rude of me," muttered Max, as he turned to a tall voyager now calmly gazing around upon the incongruous throng.

The Marechal de Noblesse was decisively answered by Princess Zenaide, who drew up her stately form in

derision of the fawning tchinoviks now welcoming the Czarewitch's officials. "We are the guests of the Belle-gardes, but only for to-night, as we sail on the early tide," briefly remarked the captive Princess.

Lazareff's brow visibly darkened as he heard her words.

When von Dornberg turned to his fellow voyager, he noted with surprise the Chief of Police earnestly whispering to Karl von Geist. There was a marked deference in the official's manner. The Czar's police are argus-eyed.

Nadine Valdor curiously eyed the tall stranger of fifty, whose startling pallor of face was accentuated by a deep scar telling of a wicked right-cut sword slash. A world-wanderer—and a wily one, too.

Ritter von Geist, with perfect courtesy and a deep bow of deference, was then introduced into the rapidly gathering circle around Max.

Already the stout Intendant, Alexei Patkul, was aiding von Dornberg's valet with the disembarkation of the luggage of his master. In a few whispers, Nadine gave her visitor all their proposed movements, while Princess Zenaide made the Prince Lazareff and the Ritter von Geist known to each other. The gallant of twenty-seven keenly eyed the masterful-looking stranger, who steadily returned his gaze.

It was only when von Geist, with an alert glance around, made an almost imperceptible sign, that a peculiar smile softened the pitiless lips of the young Prince.

"I am sure that we shall soon be very good friends," he said, with a glance in the direction of the pompous Gorski, already seeking his future inamoratas among the ladies of the St. Petersburg party.

For the handsome Chief of Police, an ex-Cuirassier of the Garde, firmly believed in his own irresistibility. He was an Adonis in uniform.

The carriages of Count de Bellegarde were in waiting, and there was an evident embarrassment as the two stars of the Catherine Institute slowly moved toward them.

A gray-coated General, grumbling his way down the gang-plank, lifted his eyebrows in amazement as von Geist calmly saluted him, standing there in earnest converse with his now embarrassed host.

There was evident feeling in Karl von Geist's voice as he gravely said: "Remember, Max, your long absence. You are the guest of the Bellegardes for to-night. I knew this land once, but only in my boyish days. Pray, leave me here at the Hôtel de Petersbourg for a few days.

"I will soon hear all the chatter of the local loungers. I may even pick up some hints of a convenient country estate for sale.

"When Madame la Baronne has heard all your world-wanderings, when you have gone over your island kingdom and made acquaintance with these beautiful young goddesses, you can send the boat back for me. Then claim me as your household guest."

"Be it so!" laughed von Dornberg. "I know your stoic self-discipline. But, we will claim you the moment I have finished the ceremonies of the home-coming."

The Ritter bowed punctiliously. "I shall so, then, through you, send my greetings to the Lady of the Isles, and become her subject at your summons."

At the carriage-side, von Geist, with the aplomb of a man of society, took his leave of the young ladies, and gazed in surprise as Fedor Lazareff pressed forward. The young gallant was but coldly received.

"I shall call and pay my respects this evening at the Bellegardes," the young noble carelessly said, directing his remarks, with an easy insolence, past the frowning Max, to the shrinking Nadine.

He noted with a quick impatience that his roses now lay on the cushions in a vacant corner.

"Pardon, mon Prince," coldly said von Dornberg. "I shall claim my foster sister's society, after twelve years' absence; and we sail on the early morning tide. Countess von Dornberg has not yet sanctioned, I believe, Baroness Valdor's social *début*." His words were icy in their chilling politeness.

The elegant figure of Lazareff quivered under his suppressed rage, but he lifted his hat in silence, only murmuring, "*Au plaisir*," as the delighted Princess Zenaïde bowed to him with a mocking smile.

"Curse that Swedish lout!" growled Lazareff, as he watched the now retreating carriage.

He turned to the observant von Geist: "Let me drive

you to the hotel," he eagerly said, in a low voice. "I am at the Hôtel Salon, opposite you. We must confer at once. What's your little game here?"

The ashen-faced stranger knitted his brows. He ill brooked the pumping process.

"Principally, minding my own business, Lazareff!" he roughly said, for the departing crowd had now left them alone of all the *haute volée*.

"I am here in the interests of the Knights of Malta and the Order of Teutonic Knights. I may even buy a country place, for I shall watch over our cause in the Baltic Provinces for some years. You are of the same quarrelsome strain, I see, as your lamented father. Look out for Max von Dornberg! He was the best swordsman in the Franconia. No German ever stood up before him. He is a slashing sword, and as rash as you are."

"Damn his swordsmanship!" cried Lazareff, drawing out a jewelled cigarette case. "Did you know my father?" His voice was eager enough now.

"I knew every oak from Riga to Reval long before you were born," slowly growled the impatient Ritter.

"And you are going over there? Where did you pick up this boor Max?" said Lazareff, whispering a word which relaxed von Geist's stubborn face.

"I've been on his trail for years," quickly replied von Geist; "Paris, Berlin, Heidelberg, London, and all over the Continent. There was no way to get at the Lady Mother, and you know he will soon be the head of the Swedish nobility of the Baltic Provinces. He's a queer fellow, and a fire-eater—a true Swede."

"Have you ever met the Countess?" said Lazareff, as the luggage vans moved away and they strolled over to his carriage.

"No!" sternly answered von Geist. "The government has never got inside her lines over there on that cursed nest of the Königsmarks; but I am now directed to make the *entrée*. It's a very delicate matter, too."

"You will find a secret-service friend over there," musingly said Prince Lazareff. "A wild enough nature, too. Olga Luboff is a Kharkoff woman, and Count Tolstoy has picked her out to be the companion of this young Circassian devil, Princess Zenaïde.

"She is his own secret agent. By the way, General

Dragonoff's own brother captured this Aida as a child in Schamyl's camp. There's a queer story about her. The Crown fell in to her wonderful wealth, and they will never let Princess No Name know her real ancestry or visit the Caucasus!

"Dragonoff is an aide-de-camp of the Emperor, and comes here as the Grand Duke's Master of Ceremonies. Beware of him! He is an old fire-eater."

"Who gives this Luboff woman her orders?" gravely asked the Ritter von Geist.

Lazareff laughed. "Ivan Gorski is supposed to, but she has easily tamed that straw-stuffed lion. He is in love with his own shadow, and then, her bold black eyes come in as a good second. She—this deep one, the Luboff—reports only to Tolstoy himself."

"Then, Gorski will easily set me right with her," said von Geist, as they clattered along over the little neck of land to the square where once the mailed knights formed before the gates of Hapsal Castle.

"By the way, he reports secretly to me, to-night, and you must absolutely avoid me here until we have made an open social friendship.

"I will have Gorski ask you to meet me at dinner to-morrow, and then, after that, you can show me the outlying country.

"I wish you later to bring me into the social circle of the Bellegardes, the Dragonoffs, and all the summer set here. I do not wish to be made very prominent by the von Dornbergs. It might complicate me later."

When they shook hands at the door of the Hôtel de Petersbourg, Prince Lazareff walked slowly homeward across the square.

"A cool old hand is this same Ritter von Geist. He must be high up in Tolstoy's dangerous game, for he has been surely brought back here to play some star part."

But Fedor Lazareff soon forgot all the hidden wiles of the Russian government in dreaming that night of the bewitching Nadine Valdor's tender brown eyes. It was a maddening passion which goaded him on, and he recognized a dangerous foe in the stalwart Swede.

"Wait, my lady, only wait!" sighed Lazareff. "This big brute will soon fall into the clutches of our people, and then you shall learn to smile upon me!"

His Tartar face was gleaming with a flush of passion as he muttered: "Only wait! I am on the winning side, and, von Geist shall help me."

Max von Dornberg, as he drove away, was thoughtfully studying the faces of the two young beauties who had suddenly flashed out upon the darkness of his lonely life. He was conscious that both the brilliant graduates of the Catherine Institute were keenly observing him as they were rapidly driven over the long spit of sandy shore, toward the Château de Bellegarde. And Hapsal now seemed an enchanted shore.

He listened politely as Princess Zenaide pointed out the Esplanade, the great bath-houses, and named the embowered datchas of the lesser nobles.

"How lovely!" he murmured, as they swept past the rival hotels on the great market square, with the overhanging walls of Schloss Hapsal towering high to the east.

Hats were doffed right and left as they drove along to the south, where the Monk's Garden hid the historic Château de Bellegarde, once the seat of the great Swedish Field Marshal, Jacob de la Gardie.

It was not of the superb gardens, worthy of Bassora or Damascus, that he spoke in his reverie, nor of the glories of the dying day. His heart had leaped up under the gaze of the beautiful brown eyes of Nadine Valdor.

There came a golden rift in the ashen clouds of his lonely life, and, with a suddenly born jealousy of the ogling Tartar Prince, he discovered that new duties had suddenly fallen upon him. All the gentle fiction of the "adoptive brotherhood" was swept away, and the beautiful girl at his side determined his future plans, hitherto so vaguely misty. For he was only a man, and twenty-four!

"She is a career to me. It is mine to watch over her and keep away the hungry Russian horde," he murmured. His eyes met those of the Princess Zenaide, who had read his inmost thoughts with the second sight of her mystic race. There was a glance of mutual approval, bespeaking the establishment of a secret alliance.

"Who is this Lazareff?" Max demanded, as Aida pointed to the gates of the old feudal park.

The Circassian tossed Prince Fedor's flowers to a

group of peasant girls as she bitterly said: "He is our *âme damnée*. It is well that you came home, for he has been both bold and insolent in his pushing attentions. His father led on the puppets of Samarin until his death. And the Spider of St. Petersburg has now selected the son to 'Russianize' our decaying nobility. You know what was promised to Finland by the crafty Peter the Great.

"Only in the last few years was the Diet called together. Russian honor slept nearly a hundred years, and yet the Finns are essentially free, under the Constitution of '69.

"Fedor Lazareff is the agent of the National Party—a noble Judas! Three years ago the Governor-Generalship of Livonia, Esthonia, and Courland was abolished by the bloodthirsty Timacheff. The old Hanseatic constitution has been supplanted by Russian 'tchinoviks' in every town, and the proud old Baltic Provinces will soon crouch under the crack of the Cossack whip. The Oestland is doomed to crouch under the Russian knout!"

"The nobles!" cried Max, with flashing eyes, as they swept up to the vine-shaded portico of Château de Bellegarde. This ominous future thrilled his hot, rebellious blood.

"German, Pole, Swede, and Dane, all have been seduced into the tinselled service of the Czar. The great Catholic and Lutheran families have been embittered, their heiresses skilfully married to court dangles, or else to *mouchards* like this Lazareff," answered Zenaide, with a sneer. "It is the old policy of Division, Destruction, Annihilation!" She had seized his hand in her enthusiasm. For the fair Tcherkess girl was a defiant rebel at heart.

"The sons?" moodily murmured Max.

"Have been denied a career at home, driven out to be world wanderers or Parisian *roués*, while the Lazareffs would mingle their moujik blood with the descendants of kings!" angrily said Aida, the reckless.

Her answer smote him like a blow in the face. "I have come home to stay!" he said. "I will take up my mother's life-work. Here among the Baltic nobles I can find a noble career. Fedor Lazareff shall find his match! I thank you for your warning."

The veiled purpose of his mother in his twelve years' expatriation was now made plain to him. The Circassian captive's words had opened his eyes, and he was thrilled with a new pride as the Count de Bellegarde, at his open doors, extended a kinsman's hospitable hand.

"You are of our race," the old, snowy-bearded noble said. "And here is your home when you honor it."

There was a welcome, too, in the winning smile of the Lady of Hapsal, standing there with her fair-faced daughter, Alixe, the young châtelaine. And so, Max von Dornberg came home to his friends.

The ceremonial dinner was waiting in the old hall where Charles the Twelfth's great Generals had feasted after Narva, and the blushing Nadine Valdor was able from her post of honor at the Count's right hand to secretly contemplate the bronzed, soldierly-looking traveller. Her own heart was softly stirred.

For years the letters of Max, the wanderer, had led her out into Fairyland. But to-day, General Valdor's daughter, with a bound, had stepped into a new sense of womanhood, for she had not found words to answer the Circassian's spirited comment.

"I find him a man. He has the *bel air*," frankly had cried the imperious captive, whom only two friendly souls dared call by the endearing name of "Aida." "And you?" Her keen eyes were fixed upon the blooming Hebe.

Nadine Valdor had fled away, unanswering, for a deeper crimson than the heart of the rose suddenly dyed her cheeks. The thin veil of the flimsy foster relation had been rent forever by the glowing glances of his fearless blue eyes.

"You are not a realization, little one," he had whispered to her. "You are a revelation, and I shall punish you. You shall take me to all your secret places—tell me the whole border lore of *le pays sablonneux*—and show me the misty island kingdom which you love so dearly. I shall be a captive knight, led by a beautiful fairy princess."

"Then I will begin to-night, Max," the beauty softly murmured. "For the moon is in its splendor, and the 'White Lady' walks on the Schloss ramparts. I will

show you the castle garden alone. You must be my faithful pupil, for no one but myself shall teach you the hidden pathways of our Baltic Lorelei.

"I know all the hidden secrets of the winds and waves. Dago, Oesel, Mohn, and the shore from Spint Head to Dome Ness know our falcon flag. I am the sailor queen of these Baltic shores."

"You shall find me your loyal subject," murmured Max, with glowing eyes. "Tell me only what to do to gain your forgiveness for my desertion." The young Hebe stood before him, a rosy goddess of Life's ambrosial spring.

"Do not leave us, Max," she whispered. "There is a league of Love formed even now. Maman needs you sorely. The times are troublous. And, Zenaide shall work all her Tcherkess charms. She is a witch of the blue Circassian mountains."

"I need no spell, Nadine, but your own wish, henceforth my law. For I owe something to you for these years of absence," the young noble said, almost fondly. He had drunken of the honey dew of Paradise already.

There was a first revelation of the constraint of the insincere Russian life *à la mode* in the restrained ceremonies of the dinner. Count Max with inquiring eyes sought an explanation of the Princess Zenaide, who was seated with him at the foot of the table, with Madame de Bellegarde.

The hawk-like eyes of the captive rested upon the perfunctory guests, who might become dangerous if aught but English "style" or French "modes" entered into the banal conversation.

There were present a tutor, two governesses, and Mademoiselle Olga Luboff, representing the troublesome secondary element of château life.

While Olga Luboff's sullen, heavy-jawed face gave no sign, her piercing Tartar eyes roved from the beautiful heiress at the head of the table to the stalwart wanderer. She was a wolf on the watch.

Her massive, stocky frame, her pillared neck and straight-cut, thick mane of coarse, black hair proved the hardy Muscovite in every racial sign.

Her strong brown hands seemed massive as a warrior's compared with those of the slender, sidewise-looking

governesses, who furtively eyed the handsome noble. Veiled repression only kindled their ardent longings for a higher career, and they were of the cult to whom the word "amour" was as the blast of the trumpet to the war-horse.

The *mains si blanches* of the Countess Bellegarde were chivalrously kissed by her homecoming kinsman as the Count rose, and for the first time Max felt the lips of a hostess upon his brow. It was the opening of his career as a leading patrician of the Baltic.

Princess Zenaide whispered, as she was haled away to the grand piano for a Chopin outburst: "Take Nadine out into the castle garden. And, be sure that you are alone. You are now in the land of spies—of traitors—of all that is brute Russian! Over there," she pointed seaward, "you will have none but loyal hearts around you. Distrust even your own shadow—here!"

The grateful Max hurried away from his fatherly host, who had drawn him away for a moment into his library. Count Bellegarde's voice was grave, even in its outspoken affection, as he said: "You must come to me, alone, for guidance. Remember, your father was my nearest kinsman and I his only confidant. After your mother's long-yearning heart has been satisfied, come back to me here. We all have a dangerous part to play.

"And you and I, must be actors. Like a lion creeping nigher, comes on the resistless Russian bureaucracy. For the Grand Duke's coming brings us all under the sweep of the Third Section's flail.

"Lithuania, Courland, Poland, all have been Russianized. Beware of every new associate here! This is your *entrée* to the Castle Dangerous."

"This Fedor Lazareff?" earnestly queried Max.

The old Count frowned. "A Kalmuck Tartar, *à la mode de Londres*—English social calm hiding the fierce and corrupt heart of a man already a social outcast at twenty-seven.

"And yet, as Marechal de Noblesse, he has the ear of men high in the Ministry. Rich, reckless, already infamous in his mad vices, he is a man to be shunned. I shall warn Dragonoff of Lazareff's character. It is perfidious, even for a *blasé* Russian boyar noble."

Out under the silver stars, through the little wicket

gate joining the Bellegarde park to the silent interior of the mouldering Castle, Nadine Valdor shyly led her stalwart captive. The chivalric old Count watched him disappear with a sigh fraught with bitter memories.

"Where is his fitting career now? Diplomacy? No! They murdered the father abroad to break up an old border family. The Army or the Navy? Only Russians forge to the front. The Court—a hot-bed of dangerous intrigue, a wild Vanity Fair.

"And here—what snares may not be set for his feet! For, Lazareff covets Nadine Valdor's vast wealth.

"I must warn Marie von Dornberg. We are all to be crushed like the great Polish families. Only the Radzivils and Potockis there, by a slavish complaisance, have clung to their acres. If I dared trust to this stormy-hearted Circassian eaglet! She hates the tyranny of official Russia. She may help us."

But, in the white moonlight, Max von Dornberg had found a lovely Eve in a new Paradise, as Nadine led him on through the enchanting shadows of the great old keep. Their hearts were drawn together in the silence of these hushed, moonlit hours, and Max von Dornberg soon knew of all the fond contrivances of his mother's heart to do honor to the returning heir.

For them the "White Lady" gleamed down from her post on the battlemented eastern wall, and their feet lingered long in the delightful shade of the Lover's Walk.

They had at last traversed the great parallelogram, with its bastioned keep thrown out to the north, where once seventy cannon thundered in defence of a Swedish monarch's trust. And the old fire-breathing fortress was now but a haunt of tender lovers.

Turning an angle of the old cathedral, after one last glimpse at Hapsal Bay gleaming far beyond them over the roofs of the embowered villas, Nadine started back in terror as they came upon a man and woman in earnest converse.

The man quickly sprang away into a darkened groined arch as the woman, serpent-like, glided swiftly away through the graceful trees which had stormed the old works in the silent years of Schloss Hapsal's decay.

"Take me home, Max!" whispered Nadine, clinging

to his arm. Her lovely face was strangely pallid in the moonlight, and her heart beat violently with a vague new alarm. She had surely seen the mocking, smiling face of Fedor Lazareff lurking there upon her path, but Max von Dornberg recognized alone the scowling lineaments of Olga Luboff.

He had acknowledged a first presentation to Princess Zenaide's companion with a grave bow, but there was only contempt in his eyes when he reached the portico of Château de Bellegarde with his startled companion. For the "personal companion" seemed to keep lonely love trysts.

But, standing there under the Chinese lanterns with the Princess Zenaide, there was a malicious triumph in Olga Luboff's eyes.

It was Princess Aida who cried with decision: "Time and tide wait for no man. We must be away at day-break, and so, Nadine, you are my captive. We have all the summer for the local education of Count von Dornberg." Olga Luboff made no sign of her detection.

As the *adieux de soir* were being made, Max drew the Circassian aside. "Tell me, have you been out to-night in the Schloss garden?"

"I have no cavalier," laughed Aida. "In fact, I sent Olga Luboff to warn you of the late hour, but she could not find you. Your first *tête-à-tête* was longer than you imagined."

In the state bedroom, the trembling Nadine Valdor confided to her dauntless friend a new proof of Fedor Lazareff's insolence.

"He followed after us there—Lazareff! We came suddenly upon him in the shadows. Thank God, we are going back to Worms! For Max might be embroiled. We must surely keep these two men apart."

"I see," dryly remarked the tall beauty. "You are already learning a wisdom beyond your years. But, in this case you are right."

When Princess Zenaide at last sought her own apartment the maid told her that Mademoiselle Luboff had already retired, and Zenaide soon fell into unrestful dreams of the future.

And the watching Max von Dornberg never saw from his window that dark form gliding back again to the wicket in the ruined castle wall.

While the young noble gazed out in the serene moonlight, hastening away with flying feet, Olga Luboff kept the interrupted tryst to which the enraged Lazareff had summoned her. For Colonel Ivan Gorski had delivered letters of great moment to the grave-faced guest of the Hôtel Petersbourg.

He had already made the way smooth for von Geist.

A word to the hotel-keeper had made that functionary most slavishly obsequious to the stern man whose sober exterior denoted merely the travelling German of rank. "Not even the slightest annoyance must he suffer!" warningly said Colonel Gorski, as he whispered the name of three mighty agents of the Czar's will.

"You are responsible to me for him. Remember, no visitations of his luggage, no prying—on your life!"

"I have found the very place for your Excellency," whispered Gorski; "the marble palace of Boris le Bossu, at Weissenstein. It is a noble and retired manor."

"Good!" briefly rejoined von Geist. "Remember, I am to be kept strictly incognito. Where can I meet this Luboff woman to-night? She must be put under my orders at the Island. I may need to use her, for I shall be left alone in that nest of sly Swedish conspirators."

Colonel Gorski led his superior to the old gateway of the castle, where the crozier, mitre, and sword surmounted the shields bearing the eagle and three stars. "Here is our local Place Saint Mark," he laughed.

"Lazareff is the secret master of the domestics in Bellegarde's château," he whispered. "And I will have Fedor bring her out here to you," said the Chief of Police, as he pointed to a shady bower.

"Wait there, and avoid the trysting lovers, for the May madness even now is at work." There were happy couples wandering everywhere.

Ten minutes later, von Geist clutched Fedor Lazareff's arm as he turned away. In the distance, a woman's form was flickering under the friendly trees.

"What is her nature—her secret—her weakness?" demanded von Geist. The Prince laughed as he sneered: "Hating herself in the mirror for her lack of beauty, and tyrannizing Gorski, who passionately adores

her. The exterior of a Cossack, the heart of a wolf, the soul of a Catherine—that's the Luboff."

The burly stranger paused a moment. "Get post-horses ready as soon as these people sail, and you can take me over to Weissenstein to-morrow.

"I wish to see if the Château de Boris suits my purpose." The young Marechal de Noblesse bowed in an obedient silence. "Remember, your absolute secrecy is enjoined. I will give you your acting cue before I visit the island."

Without awaiting an answer, Karl von Geist strode forward to meet the woman whose spying was von Dornberg's first warning of the intrigues woven to net Nadine Valdor's splendid fortune.

Olga Luboff followed von Geist into a thicket, whence a nightingale's plaint of love was sounding on the night air. Fedor Lazareff had given her the secret summons which made her tremble at von Geist's voice. With a wildly beating heart, she answered every query of a ten minutes' searching examination as to the unknown kingdom of the misty island. She knew the awful power he represented—the Secret Bureau!

"And Lazareff, what would he seek at Worms?" demanded von Geist.

"Baroness Valdor's fortune to purchase the Dornberg estate, when this reckless son Fedor goes the way of the spendthrift father," answered the frightened woman. "And, moreover, he desires the girl as coarsely as if she were an actress."

"And, your Tcherkess Princess?"

"Loathes him," stubbornly said Olga. "She hates him, as she does every Russian, with a Circassian vendetta."

Karl von Geist mused apart a moment. "Listen to me!" he growled. "He shall have neither the girl nor her wealth. I will dispose of these Dornbergs to suit my own purposes. What they are, is my own business. You are to watch the four people at Dornberg, to work my will, and to be sleepless in my cause. Fail me, and I will order your lover Gorski to Siberia!"

The woman fell on her knees. She sobbed: "I will be your true slave! Will you keep my secret?"

CHAPTER III.

“YOU ARE IN RUSSIA NOW!”

The leaden morning mists still clung to the shallows of Hapsal Bay when Max von Dornberg was roused, for the tide began to run seaward. The song of the lark resounded in the superb park which fenced off the antique manor house from the village clustered around the stately keep of the warrior knights.

Von Dornberg, an early riser, was wandering under Nadine's window when her sweet face and merry laugh greeted her new champion.

The carriage was already in waiting at the door, and the courtly Bellegarde bestowed a hasty benediction and all the spoils of his greenhouse upon the still sleepy beauties.

Max eyed the strange scene in Hapsal Square with wonderment. There was all the clatter of the early market going on. Where once the Porte Glaives and Teutonic Knights mustered their retainers of the Tête-Noires, and their banded Letts and Esthonians, scores of ark-like, little, open market-wagons were now drawn up.

Shock-headed Oestlanders, sturdy Swedes, and a sprinkling of Russians and Finns chattered with the matronly “haus-fraus,” bent on bargains.

A bevy of bright-eyed serving-maids were already flirting with the tall young soldiers clad in hunting green and booted to the knee, whose headgear was still marked with the three crowns, the last legacy of the vanished Swedish conquerors.

On past the silent villas, the carriage sped along, followed by the wagonette, where the sullen Olga Luboff dominated the Intendant, rapt in a secret contemplation of Tatiana Pashkof, Baroness Valdor's winsome St. Petersburg maid.

The white curtains were still dropped in the windows of the long one-story villas, raised up a half-story on heavy masonry to avoid the dampness of the winter snows. In every window were clustered flowering plants,

and the white walls of the villas gleamed out gayly from the embowered gardens. A scene of sleeping rural village beauty!

Already a few isvostchik drivers were lazily blinking upon the seats of the open barouches in the square, their curled-brim silk hats, puffed blue-skirted red-ingotes with silver bell-buttons, and eternal cigarettes stamping them of the guild of the Russian Jehu.

Few of the careless sleepers in the summer town knew how many of these flaxen-haired dissimulators reported directly to the burly Colonel Ivan Gorski, greedy for more medals. The spy trade is a wholesale one in Russia.

The Angelus was serenely sounding out from the Glockenthurm as a platoon of hardy Cossacks rode listlessly up the deserted streets, their carbines stuck jauntily under their right legs, and the sharp Circasian swords dangling, silver sheathed, at their left sides.

A heavily loaded post-chaise rolled up to the door of the Hôtel Salon, with the fretful face of a faded beauty appearing at its curtained hood, while, with a wild flourish, a post troika, with jingling bells, drew up before the rival Hôtel Petersbourg *en face*.

Prince Lazareff had not forgotten his orders!

"Are there Russian soldiers quartered upon us?" demanded Max, in surprise, as the notes of a bugle floated down upon the morning breeze from a clump of trees beyond the point.

"A battalion of Foresters, a regiment of the Guard, and one of Cossacks, with dear old General Dragonoff, my guardian, in command, to protect our Imperial visitors," said Nadine. The young noble laughed scornfully.

"Does the Czarewitch have to sleep within picket-lines, here in our peaceful and loyal Esthonia?" he wonderingly said.

But, Princess Aida, with an imperious gesture, laid her finger on her lip and pointed to the coachman, in a mute warning. There was an evident distrust in those gleaming Tcherkess eyes.

Then, for the first time Max von Dornberg felt the repressive instinct of the Russian subject. He had been a "citizen of the world" up to his arrival at Reval.

The Russian *valet de place* sent by his watchful mother had arranged all the formalities of their landing from the Copenhagen packet.

The rencontre of the night before returned to him to cloud his brow as they approached the end of the quay where the "Aslauga" lay awaiting them with her sails freed, ready for hoisting.

There was already a squad of sleepy soldiery on duty, with a rough-looking Lieutenant of Police glaring out from a little sentry-box. All savored of repression and official meddling. It galled the young noble.

Max drew Zenaide aside. "Are you afraid of the sound of your own voice here now?"

"Ah! *mon ami*," sighed Aida, "you have many days of trouble before you, I fear! One thing we women have learned at the Catherine Institute, and that is, to talk, and say nothing!

"Remember, you are in Russia now! There is an end of the old Hanseatic privileges! The mills of the gods are grinding us all up!

"I have been torn away from family, friends, my birthplace, and have lost even my name, to say nothing of my wealth!

"Beware, for *you* have something left to lose! Your outlying estates, from Oesel to Reval, even your island home—all is coveted by the Russian octopus! Talk only folly's chatter till we are safe under your own roof-tree! You may be involved before you know it! Do not undo your mother's whole life-work!"

"Tell me, Princess," said Count Max, "did you meet Lazareff in the Schloss-garden last night? Nadine was so strangely frightened."

"Ah, she only saw him!" impulsively said Zenaide. "It is the old story. Fedor Lazareff has probably some spy among the women of Bellegarde's household. Perhaps one of the governesses; if I only knew which one!"—she was wolfish in her angry scorn.

Max von Dornberg checked his revelation of Olga Luboff's nocturnal prowling.

"I will only trust to my mother, or to de Bellegarde himself," he muttered, as he led the young ladies gallantly to the yacht's gang-plank. His Varangian blood crimsoned his cheek as a burly sentinel crossed their

pathway with a bayonet. The insult was palpable to a high-born patrician.

"What does the fool say?" demanded Max, whose childish Russian was now only a mental tradition.

"The passports must be inspected by the officer," timidly cried Nadine, as the Intendant came scurrying up with the required papers.

They cast off quickly, and then the beautiful "Aslauga" unfolded her white wings, sweeping out over the pearl-shaded waters, past the fleet of fisher-boats and yachts rocking on the tide.

The smoke of the departing "Constantine" was far down the winding channel, and Max von Dornberg gazed revengefully at the group of sullen soldiers impudently eyeing the two beautiful patricians.

Nadine had taken the helm, and her brown eyes were resolutely fixed on beacon, buoy, and channel spar as the breeze of morning moved and they swept out over the amethystine waters toward the west.

The dependents were huddled in a group forward, and only Olga Luboff, with a mute salutation, passed down into the little cabin of the "Aslauga."

Princess Zenaide grasped Max von Dornberg's arm with a meaning pressure. "Remember! Say little till we are safe at home.

"The veriest moujik here may be a deadly spy! So far, no one has ever got within Countess Marie's lines; but, *la danse va commencer!*

"You must be a man of mark here. Your family blends the oldest blood of the Varangian lords of the Baltic with that of the proud, lion-hearted Swedes who followed Gustavus.

"Speak little, write nothing at all, and beware of every new friend; moreover, distrust even the old ones! My companion, Olga Luboff, is a fanatic Russian. I know it; but I cannot displace her, as I am only a poor prisoner of state, in gilded chains! She has never learned a secret of my heart—and she never will!"

"Why do you suffer her hateful presence near you?" murmured Max, stealing a glance at the woman who had been Lazareff's companion in the Schloss garden, and who was, even now, stealthily regarding him.

The tall Princess smiled bitterly as she frankly said,

"General Luboff was a brave bulldog of the Czar's household. He was on duty when he was assassinated by unknown hands! His daughter is an officially designated companion to ward off any secret communications of the unforgetting Tcherkess with a Princess robbed of home, friends, birthright, and a name. I hate the Russians!"

Her voice rang out in a desperate challenge to Fate.

"And, reckless as you are, you can still advise me," said the young Count, in surprise.

"Ah! *C'est bien autre chose!*" laughed the rebellious Aida. "There is nothing left but my poor hand to give in marriage to some gadfly of the royal swarm of drones.

"But, I am the child of a race of heroes! And the icy Neva shall hide my dead body before I am married, perforce, to some Tartar brute like Lazareff!"

"Could you not leave Russia?" murmured Max von Dornberg, his blood boiling at the impending doom of this brilliant daughter of the Tcherkess kings.

Princess Zenaide sighed mournfully. "I have not even a name to inscribe on a legal passport! The Czar is graciously pleased to provide for my future; but the mills of the gods have ground up my nation, my ancestry, my possessions, and I could not face a simple *visite à la frontière* without legal papers. Besides, look there!"

She was a vision of loveliness as she clung to the shrouds and pointed to a Russian police cutter flying the blue and white cross, now standing athwart their course. The swift "Aslauga" was running rapidly down the bay before a free wind, and already the towers of Hapsal were fading away to the northeast. It was a hopeless chase.

"They have no steam cutters. The sea is too dangerous, and they can get no good coast pilots, but that same police guard-boat will hover around the island of Worms as long as I am Nadine's guest to see that I do not escape to Runae, Dago, or Oesel, and thence be spirited off to Denmark or Sweden."

"What prevents it?" stubbornly said von Dornberg. "Our yacht sails two miles to their one."

"Ah! how little you know the Bear's rough hug!"

mournfully said Zenaïde. "Your princely mother is held personally responsible for me to the government. My escape would be followed by her arrest, the confiscation of the long-coveted island of Worms, and perhaps, Siberia for her!"

"Now that you are here, you might also share her fate. So, beware of knight-errantry! The Russians have listed all the islanders of Worms! They have tried to bribe the simple folk over to orthodoxy.

"But, every art has so far failed to allure the stout Lutherans, who look up to Countess Marie as their queen.

"But, of all others, Russian passports are required, and the Lady of the Isles is sternly held to account. I would have waited longer to tell you to shun me, but remember, you will soon be a marked man!" She flashed a brilliant glance of mocking raillery upon him. "I am a dangerous friend!"

"Your future safety is to be only gained, like mine, by an apparent complaisance with the bureaucrats, the acceptance of some gilded menialship, and a future marriage with some stormy-hearted Russian bride!

"Your descendants would be duly baptized in the Greek Church, and when the island passes to you as your mother's heir, all of the great estates of the von Dornbergs and von Ehrensteins will be soon enjoying the blessings of St. Petersburg centralization.

"For your mother is the last of the von Ehrensteins, and you must either come under or else sell out to the government.

"She is the last Lady of the Isles! It is fate, and you and I are in the toils. You have voluntarily returned to Russia; you are of age, and your going out now depends solely upon the pleasure of Prince Katkoff, the General Commandant of Esthonia, at Reval.

"Beware of gaining his ill-will! Beware, too, of 'drifting under the walls of Paradise' with Nadine! That is a flimsy veil, *mon ami*, this romantic assumed brotherhood. Katkoff secretly pushes on Fedor Lazareff to win Nadine Valdor's hand and vast estates! You will be offered some 'glittering generality' of a Russian sinecure.

"Beware how you refuse it! It may lead on to your ruin!"

"For, Katkoff is argus-eyed. He dare not openly attack your mother, for she is protected by her individual manorial rights. Dragonoff, the dear old General, is Nadine's *père d'honneur*! He comes here with the Czarewitch. The plan of Katkoff is to wait till the Grand Duke comes."

"And then?" anxiously said Max, his cheek paling for a moment.

The Circassian whispered, "Prince Fedor Lazareff will probably be designated by General Dragonoff as Nadine's husband. Prince Katkoff is the bluff old General's Mephisto. Lazareff will spend a hundred thousand roubles in the summer fêtes, and a nod from the Czarewitch settles the matter. Such is a Russian wooing."

"Brutal!" cried the frank young noble.

"Ah, *mon ami*!" sadly rejoined Aida, "the Catherine Institute is only a finishing school for the Czarina's maids of honor, a training school for the suggested wives of the court favorites, and a brilliant prison for the young noblewomen in the case of the Orphans' Court, or those who, like myself, are sacred by the favor of the Czar or the Empress.

"We learn to smile and lie there with an easy grace. All of Russia's social life is a gilded lie! Distrust, dissimulation, and serpentine evasion is a woman's only road to success."

"Whom can I trust?" brokenly said von Dornberg, gazing out upon the receding shores, for they had passed the last light-house and were racing out into the channel where Worms lay still hidden by thirty misty miles of tossing foam.

"There is Biren de Bellegarde and Countess Barbe, Michael Dragonoff and dear old Excellence Helène, with your noble mother—that is the whole list."

She whispered, "See to it that you can trust yourself. See, Nadine now gives up the tiller. We are at last *en plein mer*! There is your dearest foe. A matchless temptation! In the coming years remember my words!

"Your paths lie in different directions. If she had already awakened to the game of life I would tell you to shun her till the White Czar's iron hand, by her

official marriage, has opened the gates of society to her. But, she is true, tender, and noble. I warn you now, do not pull down both houses, even as Samson at Gaza. Love is a dangerous plaything!"

"Your own future?" muttered Max, as Nadine, an enchanting vision, neared them with her serene eyes lit up with happiness. Princess Zenaide grimly pointed to a wild sea-bird winging its way over the freshening foam.

"As God wills!" she softly sighed. "I am alone on the waters of life!"

With a heavy heart, Max von Dornberg yielded to Nadine's commands, and, seated on the little cabin roof, sketched his wanderings from Japan to burning India, his Egyptian lotus days, his Italian dalliance, and all the flotsam and jetsam of a four years' drift around *le monde ou l'on s'ennuie*. And, young and gifted, he was a veritable Prince Charming.

The ringing laughter of the two beauties soon chased away the gathered clouds which darkened von Dornberg's soul. The glad sun glittered on the blue waves, the wooded shores faded away behind them, and a far, faint line to the west—his island home to be—came up out of the "misty ocean brine."

He had answered all the queries of his beautiful audience as to the expected guest with a careless generalization.

"Karl von Geist is a man who has drunk the chalice of life to the dregs. If ever a man has learned to possess his soul in patience, it is the man whom chance has so strangely thrown in my way. He knows the whole world of men, of thought, of books, of action.

"He is a profound mediæval scholar. He is fascinated by the romance of the Baltic Provinces, and proposes to buy an estate somewhere in the region of old Lithuania or the Baltic and then write an exhaustive history of the Porte Glaives and the Teutonic Knights." The young beauties were curiously interested.

"Does he know Russia?" sharply queried Princess Zenaide.

"He has roved from Khamschatka to Kherson, and from Samarcand to Archangel. He speaks Russian as few German Ritters do," carelessly replied Max.

"But he is certainly a born German or Austrian. He retired from the Knights of Malta to become a member of the Austrian order of the Teutonic Knights. So, he must be a Catholic and not orthodox. He has been tracing out the vast ancient possessions of both the old orders in Poland, and now comes to the antiquarian's choicest field.

"There is a romantic project, you know, of the union of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches."

"And this is his first visit to these 'happy shores?' " doubtfully said Princess Aida.

"I believe so," remarked Max, "though he is an old friend of Prince Katkoff. By the way, we paid our respects to Katkoff at the Prince's palace.

"There we met a Knight of Malta, Count Casimir Pulawy, a Polish noble, and his cousin, the beautiful Grafin Arline Pulawy. They have a fine villa out on the Katharinenthal, and I have asked young Pulawy over here to hunt with von Geist and myself. They will both make a tour of the Esthonian islands later."

The Circassian left von Dornberg to a recital of Nadine's memories of the Catherine Institute. He began to see, while listening to the girl's happy chatter, the fixed purpose which had guided the widowed Countess in keeping him out of Russia until manhood had given him strength to fight his own battles.

For, in the recital of Nadine Valdor's girlhood, he noted the artful implanting of the will of "Matouchka" upon the girls destined to be the ornament of the Winter Palace.

Rigorous seclusion, pride of caste, the obliteration of family ties, the artful seductions of a magnificent despotism, and all the serpentine wisdom of Catherine the Second, were made the impassible barriers between the superbly bred *élite* of the Czar's noblesse and the great, passionate, heart-wrung masses of the dreamy, melancholic Russian commons.

Max gazed upon the beautiful patrician's tender face.

"And were you happy there, Nadine?" he asked, as they glided along to where the tall flagstaff marked the home of his ancestors.

"I have only been happy here with Maman," she simply said. "We only wanted your coming to make the circle complete."

"And the Court—the splendors of St. Petersburg—of Peterhof—of Tsarskoe Zelo?" he asked. "Do they not tempt you?"

"We only wait for General Dragonoff's consent to make the 'grand tour,'" gayly cried Nadine.

"For even the Czar himself will deny nothing to the man who held Shipka Pass against those terrible Musulman hordes.

"'Ask me what you will; I will deny you nothing!' said the Czar, when he gave my dear old guardian his diamond sword."

"And, can the General resist *you*?" queried Max, forgetting all the strangely menacing warnings of the Circassian, now standing at the bow, with her field-glasses searching the wooded shore.

"No one can resist Maman," she resolutely said. "And she will aid me, for she has made my life here a Paradise. I have only lived in her heart, for Russia chills me. There is always something hanging over us. You must never leave us again, Max! Then, we will all be happy!"

As they swept on to the shore, where a great triumphal arch of green spanned the landing quay, and the whole population was assembled to greet the young Lord of the Isles, far above them, on the cliff, Marie von Dornberg gazed upon the silver sails bringing back her son into her life. The Countess was strangely troubled at heart.

Her noble face was shadowed with a long night of unrest. "How shall he know all the dangers besetting him?" she sighed. "Can I tell him all of his reckless father's past? He must take up a new life here, under the stern dominion of the resistless Ice King. Ah, the dangers—the snares!"

She gazed with happy, expectant eyes as the *feu de joie* announced the landing, and then waited breathlessly for the arrival of the cortege escorting her son in triumph to the old feudal château.

In a few moments the stalwart wanderer had clasped his stately mother to his breast!

There, in the great hall, standing before the picture of his father, where the crossed swords of Count and Field Marshal gleamed under captured banners, Marie

von Dornberg hailed her son with all a mother's tender love.

She drew him to the opened window, and showed him all her island kingdom lying fair before them in the glowing day.

"I have kept our family honor as a woman may. *It is yours to guard now, Max.* You are henceforth the master here. I give my kingdom over into your hands."

And, kneeling there before her in dutiful obeisance, he kissed the fair hands of the woman who had so graciously ruled the last unreduced stronghold of the old Swedish nobility. "You shall reign as queen many a long year!" he fondly said.

It was with a solemn grace that old Elia offered the cup of welcome as they sat down to the feast in readiness, and Nadine Valdor's sympathetic eyes shone tenderly upon Max von Dornberg as he kissed the cup and drank to the beloved one whose mother-love had drawn him home at last.

It was midnight when the revels were over, and the island shore was seen lined out afar, with its great, crimson, flaring beacon fires. Max had kissed Nadine Valdor's blue-veined hand in good-night, and Princess Aida had given him a last thrilling glance of tender warning, when Marie von Dornberg showed him the twinkling lights of a boat tossing out at sea, under the lee of the crested shores.

"There is the Russian patrol boat, Max," she sternly said. "To-morrow you are to be wholly mine! I must open to you the state secrets of our position."

"And, before your strange visitor comes, you must know all the windings of a pathway strewn with the red-hot ploughshares. For, remember it, even in your dreams, you are in Russia now!"

"And you will make it a Heaven to me, Mother mine!" cried the last of the von Dornbergs, as he drew the gallant-hearted woman to his breast.

The white stars gleamed down upon the island, through whose branching pines the night winds were sighing, as Marie von Dornberg gazed at her face in the mirror for the last time, long after she was left alone.

"No! I can not tell him all!" she sadly said. "Every woman can look back at leaves in Life's book which

are turned down forever. He shall never know the whole truth. Of what avail?"

Far away, in the great state chamber of the marble château at Weissenstein, Karl von Geist was pacing the floor in a vague unrest as the midnight bell boomed its sullen requiem for a day fled forever.

"I am safe enough," he growled. "No one knows Serge Maximoff now. The dead past is buried under the drift of years. And, even Katkoff has his cue. But the crucial test is to come. The fruition of a life's toil depends upon My Lady's pride. I have all the Czar's might behind me!

"The underlings here dare not balk me. But what Czar ever ruled a woman's heart? As variant as the throbbing sea!

"If her haughty pride holds, she will not tell him. And if he goes on in ignorance, he is mine! It is a long road that leads to the humpbacked Boris' castle of a mad lover's folly! I must lure him over here! What Arline Pulawy can not do, his headstrong nature may bring about."

The grave-faced plotter lay down to dream of a woman's long unseen face, and once again, across the vanished years, her eyes shone down upon him from the clouded past. His rugged heart was wildly awakened.

"It must be!" he cried.

"And she shall bring her stubborn heart to plead, and then I will know what victory is—then—only then!"

Far away on the Neva, in the shadow of the Winter Palace, and on the steep of castled Reval, down by the pine-fringed shores of Hapsal, tireless spiders were busily weaving a web around free-hearted Max von Dornberg, who was now wandering in his dreams, once more, in the leafy garden of Schloss Hapsal, and looking down into Nadine Valdor's shining eyes. For, the Devil's imps never sleep!

It was the grist of the mills of the Gods, whose pitiless sweep breaks the hearts of man and maid, even in these meaner days. There are modern monarchs as heartless as Olympian Jove, and as arrogantly merciless.

When Fedor, Prince Lazareff, returned alone to Hapsal, Max von Dornberg had already listened to a story

of the past which brought shadows over the happy hours spent in exploring the remotest nooks of his wave-washed kingdom.

But at the long-deserted marble château, there was already an unwonted activity. The little watering-place of Hapsal, too, was as busy as a swarming beehive with the arrival of extra steamers direct from the Neva, bringing the advance household and the portable luxuries of the Grand Duke's household.

A splendid mansion villa on the jutting point ending the Esplanade, already displayed the yellow standard and the black double-headed eagle of the Romanoffs. It was to be the summer home of the Grand Duke.

A battalion of the Paul Regiment was already encamped near the town; its superb band drew the local beauties to the Casino, and the polished rifles of the guard gleamed around the new abode of the coming Czarewitch.

Dinners, battues, evening concerts, and merry-makings drew out the fourscore of patrician rosebuds of the local noblesse, and the "Stille Promenade" soon saw stalwart valor bending over starry-eyed beauty, as the chivalric officers of the Paul Regiment pronounced the Esthonian she-slips of nobility *pas si mal tournée*. The gay season was brilliantly *lancée*.

But in the two weeks following Max von Dornberg's return the news of the reopening of the famous château of Boris le Bossu, and all the growing gossip as to its mysterious purchaser, was a coequal sensation with the expected arrival of the junior Imperial family. The old château was ablaze with a new life.

The sparkling letters of the little Countess Alixe de Bellegarde told of a grand fête at Weissenstein, which was to be honored by General Prince Katkoff, and all the proud noblesse of Reval. The old noblesse of Dorpat, Riga, Wenden, and Arensburg were to be rallied there by the Marechal de Noblesse, Fedor Lazareff.

It was Nadine Valdor who extracted the key to the mystery from the postscript. And Max von Dornberg laughed merrily as she read:

"Rumor has it that the new Lord of the Manor is a natural son of the Emperor Nicholas, a mediatized German prince incognito, a Russian Monte Cristo, or some

great noble destined to be a 'star' of the first magnitude.

"All that I do know of this mysterious Ritter Karl von Geist is that he wears both the white-enamelled, gold-edged Maltese cross of the Knights of Malta, and the black-and-white jewelled cross with the helmet and three feathers of the Teutonic Knights.

"Lazareff says that the Ritter has the Golden Fleece, also, and, if so, he is either Don Carlos, or else one of the eccentric Austrian Archdukes in disguise. But he is the reigning sensation, our greatest 'lion.'"

"It's only my expected visitor, who has bought Weissenstein," cried Max.

"Then he can not be a German," slowly said Countess Marie, her heart shaken with a new alarm.

"None but a Russian, and an orthodox subject, with correct papers—a 'legal man'—can purchase a fief in Esthonia, under the rigorous new land laws."

Princess Zenaide was keenly eyeing Max, as she fingered an old magic necklace of great Persian turquoises, inlaid with golden stars, and graven with cabalistic signs from the Koran.

The strange, wild beauty still clung to the proud Mohammedanism of her princely sires of Daghestan. "I hear now the voices of the dead Adighé, who counsel me under the midnight stars.

"This man will have a great influence upon the lives of the three whom I love best. I have searched the heavens. I will read the stars again—for you. Zenaide will battle against the false friends led on by Lazareff. He is already your mortal foe."

Before the Lady of the Isles could question her farther, the untamed eaglet had sought her favorite eyrie in Olaf's tower, where once the red war beacons burned in the huge iron cresset still clinging to its beetling wall.

Nadine Valdor clung timidly to the stately daughter of the Vikings, as Marie von Dornberg gravely said: "I must meet this mysterious man before Fedor Lazareff has banded all the Baltic noblesse around him. Why has he sought you out? He has thrown himself for two years across your path. Did he ever mention your father's name?"

"There is no mystery," laughed the unsuspecting

Max. "He may, perhaps, be an offshoot of the Radzivils, the Lazienkis, or some other great family possessing antique baronial Russian privileges on the mother's side.

"I met him first at the 'Five Hundred Years' Festival' at Heidelberg. He was First Sword of the 'Franconia' in his day. I was First Sword in my time, you know," and Max proudly tapped his cheek, scarred with the barbarous strokes of the student duelling swords.

He continued, while the Countess' eyes gleamed agnostically.

"There were Princes, Ambassadors, and Field Marshals at our board, and we all sang 'Lauriger Horatius,' and drank eternal 'Bruderschaft.'

"You will like him, I am sure, and if he has closed the doors of gossip upon his days of 'storm and stress,' it is, of course, a mystery to the vulgar.

"'Implora Pace' is the motto of philosophic middle age. But, there's a gleam in von Geist's eyes which tells me that he has lived and loved, and loving, has suffered. He never consorts with women, while he is a prince among men."

The beautiful Lady of the Isles sent Nadine away to seek out the nameless Princess, in order to have a sober conference with her son. All the three rapidly knitting hearts were touched by the rare delicacy of the Daghestan captive.

Zenaide, in this fortnight, had effaced herself, leaving the Countess to conduct Max alone over the fisheries and cattle stations, the wood plantations, and to make him known to the simple head men of the Esthonian feudal clans of the thousand loyal subjects of the new master. She had allowed Max and Nadine the freedom of their *tête-à-tête* pleasure jaunts.

In the evenings, while Nadine waked the chords of her Erard, and listened to Max's tales of the land and sea with the docile charm of a tigress at play, Zenaide lightened Marie von Dornberg's moody musings. And so left together by day the Countess was free to confer with her handsome prodigal.

When they were alone a new light gleamed in the mother's eyes, the token of her stately border pride.

She laid her firm white hand upon her son's brow.

"Listen to me, Max, my son!" she said. "I will forestall the Imperial visit, and so, your welcome to your peers of the Baltic noblesse must precede this gathering of the Russian clique to meet your mysterious guest. His rapid social movements prove that no mere restlessness of travel has led him here.

"If a friend, he must see you at your own board, with your father's friends all around you. I will summon all the heads of our own party here at once. They shall know you as you are. We must avoid all clash with the local Russian sycophants led by Lazareff, who will direct the public fêtes for the Czarewitch.

"If von Geist is an enemy in posse, he shall see you as the star of the old Baltic families, and General Dragonoff shall present us, with our two beauties in blossom, to the gracious Dagmar and the manly Grand Duke. They do say that he is a very model of conjugal honor, and the future hope of Russia. In this way, Nadine and this living enigma, Zenaide, will be safe under the care of dear old Excellence Dragonoff, who is a woman both revered and beloved.

"And only in this way can we have our dignified footing at the summer court here, and so rise above Fedor Lazareff's growing passion for Nadine. The General can counteract any demand for her hand, as she is still under tutelage. By such means only can we guarantee a future peace."

"And our future happiness, beloved mother!" warmly cried Max.

"Alas, my boy!" sighed Marie von Dornberg. "There is no stable happiness in Russia. Look at the ill-concealed domination of the ambitious beauty, Dolgourouki, in the Winter Palace.

"The land is still torn with the bleeding wounds of the Plevna campaign, Gortschakoff, Schouvaloff, Ignatief, Tolstoy, Melikoff, are all busied in pulling each other down. The peasant groans, the nobles vie in extravagance and *une vie délassée*."

"Potapoff and Menzenzeff will renew all the horrors of Schonvaleff's rule of the Third Section. We had Hanseatic privileges once; Timascheff has swept them away.

"Of our once happy islands, Oesel is now joined to

Livonia, Dago has passed under the new Esthonian bureau rule.

"Mohn is already under the heel of the Muscovite 'tchinovik,' and our own island kingdom is the last which they covet.

"You may meet the fate of Egmont under Philip II. Some allurements will be perhaps held out—some trap laid for you—and then we may be all swept away in ruin, for they covet our island, the last Swedish stronghold.

"As for security, look at the Czar himself. The many mad schemes of the nihilists. The Czar has enraged the Russians; since the Empress' death the Dolgourouki is to be Czarina! What a time! The students' risings! The red flag at Kazan!

"Since the mad Pole fired on the Czar at Paris, when Bakunin's International raised its black flag in '67, we have had the Winter Palace explosion, the train bearing the Czar blown up, Solovieff's attempt to murder, and the killing of four generals and chiefs of police.

"Even the gentle Dagmar has had threats that her children would be stolen. The Imperial family are the recipients of unnumbered omens and mysterious warnings. I feared to have you stay away, lest our estates would be confiscated and you proscribed.

"Beware of every man, woman, and child whom you meet! We are all under the impending sword! You are a man marked even now for preferment to court lackey or ruin. You must go over to Hapsal soon, meet your intending visitor, and bring him to our fête. If he is a concealed emissary our friends will know him. My mother's heart will then fight for you!"

CHAPTER IV.

"THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE EAST."

The little bay below Château Dornberg was brave with dancing yachts and fluttering colors as the first breath of May swept the freshened incense of the swell-

ing pine-buds down from the crested forests. The old Swedish banner, bearing the three crowns, floated from the highest turret of the old ancestral castle, while three huge masts out on the lawn bore the modern Swedish royal standard and the banner of the von Dornbergs and the lordly von Ehrensteins.

There were a dozen great *marquees* pitched in the vast expanse of "My Lady's Walk," their red and white stripes lending a flash of color to the gray crags and the green-walled forests. The pennons of the haughty Tête-Noires of Reval, Riga, Dorpat, Wenden, and Arensburg surmounting the tents proved that all Courland, Livonia, and Esthonia were represented to honor the home-coming of the young Lord of the Isles.

And on the free waters of the Baltic, the Norseman's home, there floated yachts from Helsingfors and Abó, from Viborg and Libau, but all bore the blue-and-white Russian cross, save the splendid "Aslauga," now driving along, wing and wing, coming in from Hapsal, with the sovereign flag of the von Dornbergs gleaming high above her silver sails.

Three hundred of the haughty old Oestland nobility had gathered around the princely woman whose ensign was the last mark of a vanished chivalry.

There were proud, loyal Finns, with their tall, stately wives and Diana-like daughters. Gallant, headlong Swedes, with their lovely consorts, smiled to see once more the friendly retainers in the blue and yellow of the old Swedish guards, standing with their four-foot straight swords unsheathed, where never yet a Russian platoon had brought the flat cap and gray surtout to mark the "nationalizing" of the last fief of the Baltic shores.

Fierce-eyed, red-bearded East Prussians, the children of the hungry sword, with their haughty, titled, noble helpmeets; cheery, gray-eyed Danes, bustling and vivacious; and dark Livonians and Courlanders, whose features showed the trace of the Lithuanian domination and the fascinating graces of the unhappy Poles, whose belt of empire once stretched from Dantzic to Odessa—they were all haughty foes of the Russian idea.

There were a thousand happy islanders gathered upon the meadows, now decked with May-poles, and

below in the bay the sailors' songs rung cheerily out over the blue sea. The old banner of the Tête-Noires, with its proud motto, *Aut vincendum, aut moriendum*, flared out bravely in the breeze blowing off from the Russian shores. It was a muster of the proudest old noblesse in the world.

It had been a fond conceit of Nadine Valdor and the imperious Princess Zenaide to supplicate Countess Marie von Dornberg to wear her coronet of state as she stood in the great White Hall, surrounded by a dozen heads of the haughtiest enemies of Russian centralization.

Grave, bearded seigneurs there, coming from their distant homes, anxiously gazed out upon the incoming yacht to see what Esthonian nobles dared to brave their Russian masters and visit the Island Kingdom.

There were sighing hearts among the Norsemen's children as they reflected how true a friend the sea had been to Dane, Swede, Norseman, and Finn.

From its wrinkled and teeming breast a third of their kindred drew a finny harvest, another third ploughed the pathless billows, and those who lingered on the shore lived within hearing of the booming surf as stewards of the sea.

All knew that beneath the waves which bore the Norseman of old on to victory were the destined channelled graves of thousands of the devoted children of the ocean.

"The hardy Norseman's house of yore was on the foaming waves."

Gazing sullenly toward the east, they now felt, in their crippled sadness, how irresistible on shore was the onward crawling Russian host.

For, welded in the chains of the once conquering Pole and the ruthless Turk and Tartar, the composite horde of Orthodox Slavs had overthrown their brave Polish competitors, obliterated the Mongol invader, and driven back the sons of Othman, far away to the narrowed shores of the Bosphorus, there to cringe under the iron walls of haughty England.

Their hearts were all heavy, even on the festal day, with forebodings of the future.

Loyally had they rallied around the dauntless woman

whom all loved, but everyone written down in the golden books of the Oestland nobility knew how helpless all their sons were to avoid Russian official slavery, all their fair daughters to repulse the fierce-eyed, swarming Muscovite wooers, and how the sacred feudal tenures had vanished forever at the icy breath of the Czar. For Right is a weak defence against Might!

The stern pressure toward orthodoxy was crippling alike Lutheran and Catholic, official preferment only followed a political complaisance, and all these bearers of historic crests knew how their grandchildren would be artfully trained up in the Page Schools, the Cadet Academies, and the Catherine Institute to blend with the children of Rurik.

As for foreign education, the Russian Government punished it with social neglect and official reprisals, and a long foreign residence meant only the final confiscation of estates bravely held for five hundred years by the sword after the Esthonion pagans had yielded to the Cross, and defended two hundred years in all the bloody struggles of the Military Brothers, the Poles, Danes, Swedes, and Germans. It was a hopeless juncture.

The shame of Peter the Great, sword in hand, forcing himself into the aristocratic circle of the Tête-Noires, in 1711, while Reval's streets were still drenched with its defenders' blood, led on to the forging of perpetual chains upon Livonia and Esthonia by the peace of Rystad, for the *Guerre du Nord* was but a hell's whirlpool of eighteen years.

And after Courland bent the knee in 1795 to the voluptuous Catherine II., each year the rusty chains had only cut in deeper. Since Alexander II. had signed the iron Ukase of 1866, the "Russian system" had brought the passport, the slinking police spy, and the rule of the greedy, cringing "tchinovik" into their daily lives.

The boldest of the nobles had gathered around Countess von Dornberg to whisper their words of faint cheer. Perhaps the young Lord of the Isles might band together the gentry of the Baltic and hold up the cause of "olden privileges."

There was one brief breathing spell in their saddened lives, in this assembly, where no Russian agent, serpent-

like, wound through their happy circle, where all hearts beat loyally, thrilled with the romance of the old.

There was one crucial test to await, however. The seniors well knew that Countess von Dornberg had deftly avoided inviting the Russian Governor-General, Prince Katkoff, from Reval.

For Max von Dornberg had made his official obeisance already on his artfully laid out return from abroad, via the sea route, which left him only for three days under the Russian flag. And Prince Fedor Lazareff, with the military commanders at Hapsal, were now busied with the impending arrival of the Czarewitch.

The Esthonian nobility! Would they dare to brave the wrath of the Russian oligarchy?

The answer was contained in the arrival of the swift "Aslauga," now folding her white wings in the bay below.

As the merry procession mounted the crested hills, a murmur quickly spread from lip to lip.

There were young beauties in profusion, with their *dames de compagnie* and watchful mothers, but Biren, Count de Bellegarde, was the only dignitary who had dared to cross the silver streak between the "nationalized" shore and the wave-guarded islet where the old régime had made its last defiant stand. The men had shirked the test of manhood.

At the side of the noble hostess stood Nadine Valdor, a dream of loveliness in her festal robes, with the mystic captive prophetess, Princess Zenaide, a quaintly oriental figure, despite her civilizing, who heard the sad whisper of Count Bellegarde in answer to the Countess's query, "Is all well?"

"I fear trouble," sighed her kinsman. "Lazareff sought Max out as we were embarking, and your fiery-hearted son refused to take his hand. He needs all your prudence now. These young hotheads!" It was an ominous sign of future quarrel.

The future of Count von Dornberg was clearly indicated by the nature of the gathered guests. Either he must be a leader of his father's old associates, or else accept an obscure toleration of the crippled noble by a hostile government.

A life of idleness, the chase, the study, the downward

path of dissipation—only these were left open to the man who, a registered Russian subject, could never inherit the feudal powers of the last of the von Ehrensteins, his steadfast mother. For the von Ehrensteins ended with her. Sword and sea had swallowed them all up.

The paw of the Bear was already raised to stretch across the channel to the man who must either yield up his ancient tenure on his mother's death, or avoid the Bear's hug by forswearing blood, religion, and honor in the rôle of slavish complaisance.

Gallantly conducting the last of the guests came Count Max, when the great White Hall was filled with the bright-eyed invaders from Esthonia. Skilfully had the temporizing shore nobles avoided the "cut direct." They had sent their lovely hostages in their household treasures, and the wisdom of the serpent duly closed their pretty lips. For, dissimulation is your only weapon under the menacing severity of the Romanoffs. Lying is the social shield for both the innocent and guilty.

The orchestra with a crash struck up the old Swedish hymn of Lutzen, "Fear Not, Ye Little Band," as Max gayly presented his blushing kinswoman, the little Countess Alixe de Bellegarde, the sweetest spring blossom of them all.

He saw his mother's gravely noble face grow stern as he turned, before her seat of honor under the old canopy of captured battle-flags, and brought up the tall, commanding stranger, upon whom all eyes were now fixed in a growing curiosity. It was the new Master of Weissenstein!

Karl von Geist's stately presence was accentuated by the lofty courtesy of his impassive demeanor. Martial and severe-looking, his cold gray eyes sought the glance of the beautiful hostess with one quick, imploring prayer. He bent over the trembling hand she had raised, and loyally kissed the blue-veined loveliness.

None but Princess Zenaïde caught the startled whisper, in Polish, which made the Ritter's voice quiver as he answered. "You here—in my house—Serge Maximoff?" she had gasped. He murmured: "He is dead; Karl von Geist lives only to save your son!" But the royal captive was no eavesdropper—no talebearer.

The flashing-eyed Circassian had proudly turned her head away to where Max von Dornberg had sprung to Nadine Valdor's side. They were a living embodiment of life and love, and the Lord of the Isles forgot all the princely ring around him as he breathed a supplication to the radiant young goddess: "You are to be mine for the ball! Remember, little one, you only dance with me! I am the king of these revels!"

Zenaide gazed at the stranger, who was now retiring from Marie von Dornberg's presence, after a few whispered words, which left the Countess as impassive as a marble Niobe. The erect figure—the jewel of the Knights of Malta and the Teutonic Order—the unbroken composure of the sturdy stranger, marked him as a man of both court and camp. He was indeed a superb and stately presence, a magnificent enigma.

The Circassian noted his overhanging brow, the dark, gleaming eyes, the strong, straight hair, the rounded shoulders and heavy, flat bones.

Pale-faced, and with livid red lips, a voice devoid of natural accent, the hard, glittering eye of the Cossack Hetman, the smooth, placid under-face of the Jesuit, and the modulated voice of the refined courtier—"A strange German savant, this one!" she murmured.

"I will know you better before you leave our island fortress," the princely captive mused, as she noted the leaders of the Baltic nobility clustering around the new Lord of Weissenstein.

Karl von Geist seemed to possess a magic power, for he drew them as the Pied Piper of Hamelin led away his bright-eyed prey to the darkened caverns of the Westphalian gnomes. He had a magic art all his own.

There was scant time for introspection, as the royal Swedish march signalled the sortie for the state banquet. Fascinated by the adulation poured out upon the man whose splendid state at Weissenstein was already the talk of the whole country-side, Princess Aida forgot herself, until Countess Marie von Dornberg approached, leaning on the arm of the chivalric Bellegarde.

With a glance of her eye, the Lady of the Isles drew Karl von Geist back to her side. "You will take the Princess Zenaide in to dinner, Ritter von Geist," she calmly said. "My son's honored guest and my dear

Nadine's heart companion should know each other better." And then, his eager eyes flashed back to her his grateful thanks.

The new Aladdin of Esthonia bowed in silence, but the steady eyes spoke tenderly to her across the peopled wilderness of the great "Weissensaal." They prayed to the woman whose smile had haunted him in all the long-buried years since they had parted as foes.

When the feast was set, Count Max, with the Countess Bellegarde, faced his mother at the head of the table, and Nadine's wondering eyes gazed across the middle of the splendid board at the Princess Aida, whose burning eyes never left Ritter von Geist's face.

And while a hidden orchestra softly breathed the music of Love, and the bravest young noble of Arensburg vainly tried to enlist Nadine Valdor's attention, her eyes would wander away from Max, "on duty service," to the grave guest opposite, who was to remain after the three days' fête had ended.

In the frank intercourse of Max von Dornberg's return, Nadine Valdor had forgotten that she was one of the greatest heiresses in Russia—a woman soon to mingle at the Court with the proudest of the Czar's nobles, and a subject who could not escape the brilliant destiny thrust upon her by birth and the magic philtre of gold.

Her own heart told her that Max had already glided into the tender deference of a man bowing before the glowing altar of her womanhood. And she proudly recalled his proscription of the other cavaliers, in the splendors of the ball to come.

But Aida's warning of the stranger's potent influence over the three dwellers in Castle Dornberg had caused her to narrowly watch von Geist, upon whose face the Lady of the Isles had riveted her gaze.

There was evidently a duel of wits between the strangely assorted pair who were the cynosure of the feast. Zenaide's thrilling beauty and the stranger's distinguished air drew all eyes.

It was in no Oestland dialect they talked, for the Circassian whispered, as her escort seated her: "Let us speak in Polish. You must tell me of your fabled château, the folly of the love-lorn Boris of old!"

Karl von Geist affected not to understand her, but he was neatly trapped. "You greeted Madame von Dornberg in Polish. I heard you, and I can compliment your accent."

"Tell me," the Ritter gravely replied, "do the children of Schamyl speak the language of the Jagellons?"

Princess Aida was ready with her rejoinder: "All the enemies of Russia speak Polish, and you know it! I learned it to outwit the dull attendants at the Catherine Institute. I hate the Russians! And the blood of my Adighé brethren flowing around my cradle baptized me, a poor, childish captive, torn away from all that nature gives.

"And so, I will not speak the language of my enemies. Those yells of Russian triumph have made me avoid the tongue of my captors. And you must not dissemble. I have the gifts of my race. Tell me why you returned. For you know this land! You have been here before!"

Karl von Geist suddenly turned and dropped his wine-glass in his surprise.

"Did Countess Marie tell you——" He stopped abruptly, as the girl proudly rejoined:

"I have only seen you in my dreams; the stars are friendly to me, and I have never even spoken your name. What you will not tell me, I shall find out; and so you may as well tell me if you are Czech, Slav, or a world-wanderer. The Russian is as many-sided as the chameleon has changing shades. You are no German!"

There was no time for rejoinder, as the wassail rose gayly around them. In the three hours of the long feast, Karl von Geist, driven to a corner, merely parried the daring questions of the woman to whose fearless nature social rules were as straw withes to Samson.

"You shall come to my tower. I will read your horoscope and trace your past life in your palm. I shall see the story of the past, the present I shall read from your face, and the future I shall know, for my heart tells me your destiny is linked to the house of Dornberg.

"For those who have opened to my orphaned heart their loving arms, Zenaide will battle, and so, Ritter Karl von Geist, behold in me your future ally or your bitter foe, for I see your life-path crossing that of the

ones whom gratitude has made dearer than the kindred who died under the hungry Russian sword!"

There was a chorus of acclamation when the last toasts were drunk, and the great ballroom was thrown open to the enthusiastic dancers.

Princess Zenaide had unwillingly deserted her cavalier for the swarm of young gallants who claimed the Daughter of the Clouds.

Moody and discontented at heart, Karl von Geist watched the loveliness of Nadine Valdor as she floated by in the arms of the chivalric Max. The wooing music brought no peace to the stormy heart of the man who had been baffled by Zenaide's daring incursions into his past.

"What weapons are of avail against a woman's feline approaches? This untameable Circassian waif may raise a storm around me to bring down the edifice of years, the slow work of Time.

"And, sacred by her helplessness in the Czar's hands, no man dare attack one who has paid all the price in her wretched, lonely childhood!"

He moved from group to group of the grave seigneurs, conscious that Marie von Dornberg was watching his every movement. He had keenly observed the face of Max in their few rencontres since the arrival under the roof of the von Dornbergs.

The wily Ritter smiled faintly. "She has not spoken—she has given him no sign of her displeasure. It is a forlorn hope, but I must face it. Her silence is my only salvation!"

With a long experience of the *beau sexe*, von Geist artfully effaced himself, until at last the Lady of the Isles, by an almost imperceptible signal, led him away to the splendid open gallery overlooking the throbbing sea and canopied only by the blue vault of sparkling stars.

His heart leaped up wildly at her summons, and a glow of success warmed his soul as, with a gracious social subterfuge, the Countess accepted his arm. Was it a capitulation? He dared not even hope.

They faced each other in the shadows of the old tower, and then she spoke the bitter words which an outraged pride sent home to him as barbed arrows.

"Were you mad to so outrage hospitality? To break

the code of honor which binds even the Bedouin? You, the Serge Maximoff I knew, to face me here again?"

With an artful simplicity of manner the strong man stood mute until the splendid woman paused, overcome by the violence of her own feelings.

"When all is said, Marie," he brokenly began, "you may know that some power beyond me has brought me back. I am in your hands to deal with as you will!

"You have spoken of my past folly, my madness, my fatal rashness, my wild pursuit of you! All the past is before us both! I came to throw myself at your feet for no pardon of my errors!

"That love of you drove me mad, that I sought vainly for forgetfulness abroad, that death would not find me in the Caucasus—that I left the Russian service and tried to tear you out of my heart—all this is nothing now. I drove forever from my heart by one wild outburst of passion the hope of winning your love fairly.

"The death of the head of my mother's line in Presburg gave me a vast fortune and the right to use the name and arms of von Geist.

"When I met your noble son at Heidelberg, I found that the boy of eight had not retained even a fleeting memory of Serge Maximoff, the Governor-General's dashing aide-de-camp.

"I learned to love him, and I loved you in him! I knew that all the officials had been changed here. Even de Bellegarde here was absent on foreign service when we lived out the four years in which I became your slave for life!" She was curiously regarding him now. He had touched her proud heart.

"You had a right to banish me! I obeyed. But look me in the eyes! Dare you say that I alone sought your love? It is the ceaseless battle of every woman's life—her defence against a horde of lovers. A word from you would have recalled me. But, smarting under your repulse, I had thrown away my career, and then sullenly burned my ships behind me!" He paused and studied her face keenly.

"I have honestly won your noble son's friendship. I come back to Russia another man! The ashes of life lie dead on the cold hearthstone of my lonely temple

of the wasted years. There is a high and holy cause to which I am vowed. A cause that is yours!

"It brings me back here another man, under another name! No one can recognize the gay aide-de-camp of Reval's palmiest days in Karl von Geist! You have seen how your noblest guests greet me!" He touched the mystic jewel of the Knights of Rhodes and the old Teutonic Order. "Treason to them would mean my instant death!

"I see Max already marked out as a victim of Russian official duplicity! Your singular power of sovereignty will not descend to him. I know all! I dare not talk, even to you, of the great events now trembling in the balance."

The mother was gazing now spellbound upon the man whose mad pursuit had once made her curse the fatal charms of her beauty. For she knew that her son loved him.

"To the work before me my whole life is vowed! And it would be idle to dream that I could come back here and not be thrown across your pathway. I have braved your anger in coming here! I now throw myself upon your mercy!

"I will go out of your presence forever if you drive me forth, but I shall live to play a man's part here in a great struggle.

"Speak the word and I go! I had asked Max to visit me at Weissenstein. He will soon be the leader of the Baltic nobles.

"He has already incensed Fedor Lazareff, and even my hand may aid you in guiding Max von Dornberg safely past the intrigues of those who would pull him down."

He paused, and his voice thrilled with earnestness as he said: "There is but one even-handed justice in the world! If you drive me out, you may tell Max of all the past, that I may then frankly own to him how far my love for you carried me away.

"But, of my secret purpose here you dare not ever speak, lest he and I and even your noble guests be sacrificed to the Russian swarm of locusts. You are loyal to the Oestland. I ask nothing, Marie, save not to be made an outcast in your son's eyes.

"For love's own sake I sinned; our lives were both thwarted. I dare not even think of my error! I will now obey your slightest signal. I have spoken my last word. But remember, in your lonely vigils, that it has been your own beloved face which has haunted my waking and sleeping hours ever since first we met. Love was stronger than my pride, my duty, even my conscience!

"And you cannot blame me now if I would look upon your face again. I shall busy myself with your guests until they depart. You will surely know your own mind then.

"I feared to write to you. I dare not divulge the secret of my quest. All I ask is that if you send me forth you will not rob Max of the memory of a friendship which was clearly his due. That is honestly mine!"

As they walked back into the glow of the dancing throng, Von Geist whispered his last prayer. "If Karl von Geist can make you forget Serge Maximoff, I shall know that there is an expiation on earth. For God's sake, hear me!" There was the agony of a hopeless passion in his voice.

Before them, in the merry dancing throng, Max von Dornberg was proudly guiding Nadine Valdor, a light of supreme happiness upon his frank brow.

Von Geist felt the woman's arm tremble as she whispered, "I will think of all, for Max's sake, my noble boy! You must wait for a sign from me!"

"To eternity, I am your liegeman!" was the answer of the man, who felt that the tomb of the past had sealed the only record that he feared.

"She will yield; it is the mother's heart that will conquer! I am safe! She will not tell my story!" was the secret verdict of the Ritter. "To betray me she would have to expose her friends, to unveil her own past to her son, to perhaps tell poor Adolf's story, and Marie von Dornberg is loyal *à la mort!*"

Withdrawing in stately guise from the ball which had spared him from Zenaide's prying eyes, the new Lord of Weissenstein dreamed new dreams that night in the old state chamber where he was lodged as a guest of the greatest dignity.

"It is going on well!" muttered Von Geist. "And

now, not too hastily, no impatience, above all, no zeal! The mills of the gods will grind, and exceedingly fine—exceedingly fine! I must give this young devil of a Lazareff his secret orders, for that pretty minx's girlish face may bring two fiery Romeos to the graveyard! There will be time enough for the girl—when Max is out of the way! Lazareff must wait. There shall be no collision now!"

And the Ritter von Geist slept with the consciousness of having made a winning score in awakening the memories of an olden love with its never unpleasing corollary of a romantic faithfulness—even in error! And—well he knew the waywardness of woman's heart!

The mullioned windows of the great Weissensaale threw long lines of light far out over the darkened waters long after Madame von Dornberg had left the spirited Oestland noblesse to the patient guidance of Countess de Bellegarde.

It was after the grand supper that the guests from the great balcony watched all the yachts below dressed in lines of living light float silently upon the purpled waters of the landlocked bay. It was a spectacle of fairy loveliness.

There was a delighted chorus of approval as, at the discharge of a cannon, all the dark crags leaped out into living light, and far away, around the distant shores, the beacons blazed up, the ruddy glow limning against the midnight skies the furthest limits of the last stronghold of the fearless Baltic pagans.

In a wild access of enthusiasm, the bold young nobles made the woods ring with three loyal shouts of "*Vivat, crescent, floreat, Dornberg!*"

Standing there in their midst, with the star-eyed Nadine Valdor at his side, Max von Dornberg turned to them all, his face glowing with delighted pride.

"I thank you, friends; the Lady of Dornberg holds you all in her heart, and it is mine now to keep the old shield unstained. There are no foes within our lines here—Dornberg's crags are a rough and perilous path for the enemy! But we are here, one in heart, to-night, one faith, one creed, one motto—*Loyal en tout.*"

By the side of the gracious Countess, her eyes gleaming with a strange excitement, stood Princess Zenaide, who had been the witch of the dance.

She raised Marie von Dornberg's hand to her lips.

"You should have been a Circassian! The soul of the Adighé beats in your breast, my mother!"

And with strange, fond words of Tcherkess endearment, the untamed captive caressed her gentle hostess as a tiger at play with its young.

While the dance went on into the early gray of dawn, Olga Luboff, her dark beauty gleaming in a gown of old-gold satin, moved among the elder nobles, unwearied in the caressing seductions of the hot-hearted Russian.

She had a smile and a sly glance for every leader.

She eagerly awaited the morrow, for the mysterious Ritter von Geist had given her work to do—the Czar's work, and his own bidding.

In her room, as she gazed out into the hushed silence of the dawn, she rose suddenly and knelt before the icon in the corner of her chamber. "May God save the Czar and confound his enemies! Grant me success, that Ivan Gorski may soon be a General and be called to his sovereign's side!"

Then she lay down, ready to betray the stately woman who had taken the stranger within her gates.

But she dared not sleep, for there was a rendezvous awaiting her. She lay, open-eyed, idly dreaming of the day when the blue and white cross would wave over the defiant island.

"It is a pity," she sighed. "He is a gallant young cavalier, rash and blind. He already sees nothing but Nadine!"

"But she must marry a trusted noble—even Lazareff—for the Czar's will must be worked out—'Russia for the Russians! One people, one flag, one creed, Olga's inheritance, the faith of Vladimir Monomach!' Ah, it will kill this brave-hearted woman, but the heart of this woman was only made for breaking—and her light-hearted husband did that long ago!"

Tossing sleeplessly on her queenly couch, Marie von Dornberg listened to the witching music floating softly up from below as her startled heart throbbed anew at Serge Maximoff's bold self-projection into her life. "Can the leopard change his spots?" she murmured. And yet his simple surrender of his fate into her hands had touched her.

"He loves Max! He could not hide his identity from me, and if some great purpose fills his later life he may atone for the passionate boldness of his fiery manhood!" With a sigh, she recalled how many men had knelt at her feet. There had been so many frenzied avowals of the flames kindled in the hearts of the reckless country nobles.

There were truths which she could not hide from herself in this lonely hour. "I would not marry," she sighed; and she confessed that even among her husband's friends, the Oestland nobility, and the visiting Russians of rank, and in the courtly orders of the Continent that the burden of the song had been the same—Love, for love's own sake, the heartless wooing of *le roi qui s'amuse!* For many other men had sinned even as Serge Maximoff.

Ritter Karl von Geist had touched her with his respectful deference. His veiled confession of the purpose of his coming inflamed her loyal pride. "Were they destined to work together to check the onrolling Juggernaut of Russian "denationalization"?

She forgot that pithy old proverb, "Old sinner, young saint," and pressed her hand upon her wildly beating heart.

"I dare not tell Max of all the past! *Qui s'excuse s'accuse!* He must not know how his father stabbed the loving heart which bore him! I will confer with the leaders of our island noblesse.

"They shall watch Maximoff! I will put him on probation. And, after his great festival is over, Max may go to Weissenstein, if I find Karl von Geist really lives, and that Serge Maximoff, the Russian boyar, has been recreated. Is there a Resurgam of the heart?" She yielded to the soft pleadings of her own awakened heart.

And so, the traitor within her gates had won a silent victory in pitting her awakened curiosity of loyalty to the brave old Oestland against the rancor of the heart he had once outraged with the rough wooing of a pleasure-loving soldier.

The birds were singing gayly in the scented gardens as Olga Luboff stole out of the castle to a clump of firs looking down on the wild, lonely western shore.

She was not long at the trysting-place until Karl von Geist, with swinging step, rapidly approached her

With a soothing confidence, the disguised Maximoff laid out the Judas work of his crafty ally.

"I shall avoid her," he concluded, "until all these fat-witted gentry are gone. Report to me her every movement, and who guide her counsels. Let Max and this rosebud heiress drift into each other's arms! They have only eyes for each other. But that Circassian devil, your strange charge, must be outwitted. I must know her every movement!

"Leave the rest to me. Be merely distantly respectful to me. I will find my way to your side.

"And now Lazareff is to know nothing from you. He is but a pawn in the game, a fool satisfied with his cap and bells. Does he make love to you?"

Olga Luboff, hardened as she was, dropped her eyes. "You know what Russians are! Every woman is an undiscovered country to them, and—they are very curious!"

Serge Maximoff laughed. "Then welcome him to your hospitable shores! We may need your influence over him—at the last—if you would be Madame la Générale Ivan Gorski.

"Your Colonel is held in the hollow of my hand, and you shall be the architect of his fortunes—but only if you obey me!" He was studying her bold, insolent beauty keenly.

"Trust to me!" she murmured. "Lazareff shall work your will! He has been at my feet ere now. But Ivan Gorski must not know. There would be bloodshed!"

"Trust me, Duischinka!" grimly smiled Maximoff. "I was a squire of dames in my youth; and you are not the first woman who has filled two lovers' hearts. It is nature's revenge! *Partout, comme chez nous!*" He moved away, merrily recalling a couplet from Tennyson,

"There were two who loved their neighbors' wives
And one who loved—his own!"

"Human nature is as various as the sea and clouds!" he cheerfully commented.

"After all, our Russian women are only disguised men in their restless, straying hearts!

"It will be a royal day for the regatta, and I shall dally with the grave and reverend seigniors. Marie's impatient heart will call me to her side.

"No woman can wholly give up a man who has loved her once! It is an abandonment of a valuable prize to the enemy!"

When the splendid flotilla swept away at noon to circumnavigate the island, Karl von Geist was serenely confident, for the Lady of the Isles had greeted him with a frank and serious glance of private intelligence. The furtive flash of her softened eyes brought hope to his heart. "Blessed privilege of woman to forgive," he murmured. "*Allons, la danse va commencer!*"

And in the whole day's excursion he adroitly ingratiated himself with the leading chiefs of families, who fell under the spell of his whispered confidences.

Upon the prow of the "Aslauga" a half-dozen tried and true bearded Oestlanders hung upon his words, and Marie von Dornberg was not slow to see that the newborn Karl von Geist possessed the "Open sesame" to hearts sternly locked against the Russian propaganda.

Late that night, when the guests gathered in the armor-decked hall, under the old rustling banners, to hear the choirs of the islanders chant the gallant song of the olden days, the Lady of the Isles drew around her all the secret chiefs of the "home-rule" party.

She knew when they drank the merry "sleeping draught" that von Geist had given guarantees beyond all cavil.

There was some mystic power in his hands which drew Pole, German, Swede, and Dane into his measured confidences.

He had artfully avoided pressing upon her, and he was intellectually the giant of the gathered patricians.

Leadership sat enthroned upon his overhanging brow, and his steady, patient eyes seemed to read man's very soul.

When the Teutonic Ritter bowed before her, as she sat upon her dais, there was a dreamy light in her eyes.

She put out her hand in answer to his deep obeisance. "Good night, Serge," she absently murmured, and as he grasped it and raised it to his lips, neither saw the gleaming eyes of Princess Zenaide fixed upon her hostess

in wonder, for the Lady of the Isles had dropped into her infrequent use of the unfriendly Russian.

"*Latet anguis in herbâ*," muttered Aida. "My time will come. And so, you are a Russian after all, my wily friend!" for her quick ear had caught the whispered reply of Serge Maximoff. "I see the break of day in the east, my darling!" It was a screed of an old song which has echoed under many a fair Muscovite's window.

"My time will come," resolutely mused Zenaide.

And then she remembered that a woman's heart is like the compass, often untrue to itself.

And the daughter of Schamyl resolved now to camp upon the trail of the enemy of her race.

"All the Russians are liars!" she cried, in her heart, "and this sleek pretender is a Russian of the Russians! I shall leave the Countess to guard her realm, but for Max and Nadine I will fight *jusqu' à la mort*!" and she blushed for Marie's womanly weakness.

The sunset of the third day brought the merry guests home, wearied from all the rustic games of the peasantry, and the last nook of the island had revealed its simple secrets to the merrymakers.

With a growing curiosity, the Princess Zenaide noted Ritter Karl von Geist's dignified avoidance of the queenly hostess.

"Either they have an olden secret to hide, or else he waits to work upon her alone when the throng is gone away," decided the Circassian. "I must ask the friendly stars. They are mute sometimes, but they never lie!"

She warmed the mystic necklace of amulet turquoises upon her glowing bosom to invoke the aid of the dead Adighè royal shades, to whom alone she prayed.

And even the velvet-eyed Olga Luboff was astonished at her secret master's cold and reserved bearing toward the Lady of the Isles.

But, Ritter Karl von Geist was the foremost spirit of the gathered nobles who met under the gloomy firs where the passionate Luboff had trembled under his searching glances.

They were on the eve of their departure. "Gentlemen and brothers of the old Faith," cried Von Geist, his voice ringing out like a trumpet call, "you are all to

be welcomed at Weissenstein! After a week of official festivities, directed by Prince Katkoff and his official suite, I shall bid you all to my lonely home. You will revive its ancient glories. I have fifty trusty fellows there now, all lay brothers who wear this cross on their hearts!"

He touched the black and white Teutonic insignia as he spoke. The bold nobles hung on his words with breathless interest.

"I will blind the Governor-General with the sparkling mists of wine! His gallants shall chase my stags, his ladies dance under the marble-vaulted dome where an Emperor once honored his hump-backed courtier.

"Then when my lines are drawn closely, for I have both steel and gold to command, we will talk there of the Brotherhood of the East!"

They grasped his hands, in the silent pledge of a new bond between them all. "Here, alone, we were safe for this tryst-making, and for years I have waited to call you there. We must be wise and silent!"

When the parting hour came, von Geist knew that his secret address had reached Marie von Dornberg's heart. She flashed a look of trusting pride upon him as the last yacht cast loose.

He turned to her and whispered, "I shall ask Max to Weissenstein when all are gone but two or three friends. Will you send him to me?"

She dropped her eyes, and it was only when Max murmured, "You like my friend," that she turned to von Geist.

"I will send Max to you—but—only if you come back with him," she said, holding out her trembling hand. And he bent over it, and smilingly kissed it.

"Your wish is my law," he answered.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE OLD CHÂTEAU DE BORIS.

With a sigh, Countess von Dornberg saw the white-winged yachts glide away, one by one, with their proud ancestral pennants floating above the blue-and-white Russian cross. Only the "Aslauga" lay there now below, with its loosened sails, ready to waft back Max von Dornberg's bevy of Esthonian beauties. The great fêtes were done.

There was a final family conference of three hours between the Countess and the de Bellegardes, while Zenaïde, Nadine, and Max directed the last merry mazurka of the remaining beauties and the young Oestland gallants who had chivalrously voted to escort the demoiselles back to Hapsal's happy shores. Hearts, heads, and heels were all light in this joyous circle.

The old feudal Lord of Hapsal listened to Countess von Dornberg's forebodings as to the venturing of Max and Nadine into the huddle of the Vanity Fair, soon to be gathered around the heir to Russia's heavy crown.

"Give yourself no alarm, my dear kinswoman!" cried the courtly de Bellegarde. "We have rigidly excluded Lazareff from our home circle ever since Alixe's dawning womanhood.

"Vicious and unprincipled as the jackanapes Marechal de Noblesse undoubtedly is, he always remembers that I am the Lord of Hapsal.

"Max and Nadine will be our guests. Nadine shall share Alixe's presentation to the Czarevitch, and the lovely Dagmar is always tenderly gracious to my dear Barbe.

"With Dragonoff, your co-trustee, whom the Czarevitch adores, you are safe. It is well known, when the Grand Duke becomes Alexander III., that Dragonoff may ask anything he wishes.

"As for Max, you tell me that he does not play. Of course, he is Fedor Lazareff's superior in rank. I shall carefully guide Max, and so, prevent any social collision. Trust all to me."

"Ah," sighed Marie, "I fear trouble! Lazareff is the chief of the gayest Russian youth, and my Max will take rank at once as the head of the Oestland nobility. They are both young and reckless. There is Lazareff's pursuit of Nadine, and you know how hot-blooded all the von Dornbergs are! Poor Adolf always carried a too ready sword! And Max has fought his way up to the head of the 'Franconia,' the very wildest student corps of Germany!"

As she spoke, at the end of the long hall Max and Nadine came into view, leading the troop of blushing beauties who came to take leave, for the "Aslauga" had already fired the parting gun.

The princely old noble gazed at the splendid pair before him, with his kindly blue eyes dimmed with a fatherly emotion. His heart went out to them.

"Let us trust to the kindly fates. I will give a Grand Fête to the Imperial family when you come to pay your own homage. I will warn Dragonoff to aid me in keeping these two young cockerels apart.

"Hélène, Dragonoff, you, and my wife shall never lose Nadine from sight. She will be thus saved the stormy wooing of Fedor, who only covets her wealth.

"The Lazareffs are all great money-seekers. Dismiss your fears.

"We men will watch over Max, whose hostile pride will surely keep him aloof from Lazareff's dissipated circle." And so, Marie von Dornberg calmed her anxious presentiments, and saw her noble son lead away his guests, with a last thankful glance at Biren de Bellegarde.

"I will be back on the morning tide," gayly promised the young Lord of the Isles; "for Nadine and I are going to-morrow to superintend the opening of the deep-sea fisheries." It was a merry leave-taking.

"He will not linger long on the mainland!" laughed Count de Bellegarde, with a glance at the blushing face of Nadine, who fled away after her departing guests.

It was after the Bellegardes had departed in the antiquated family coach that Marie von Dornberg saw von Geist's tall, soldierly form, throwing a black shadow across the doorway, where she stood radiant in the glowing sunlight.

His delicate consideration during the fêtes had touched her. He well knew how to efface himself. And he had played every card to win.

"And have you any further commands for me?" he asked, with a submissive deference.

"Promise me," she pleaded, "that you will keep Max and this insolent Lazareff apart. You know the way the last von Dornberg died!"

"It was to tell you this that I lingered, Marie," he said, taking her unresisting hand.

"I have not asked Max to meet the official mob, whom I must first placate. It would put him in the false position of a tuft-hunter. I must have Fedor Lazareff there, however, as *maître de ceremonie*.

"But he will reconduct Prince Katkoff to Reval. I promise you that I will keep these two young hot-bloods apart. Max has already wounded Lazareff's pride, but I know a way to tame the unprincipled youngster.

"Count on me. I will reconduct your son here, and only the inner circle of our own people shall be kept back in the Marble Palace, under pretense of a week's battue."

The Countess's cheeks flamed crimson under his steady gaze.

"Guard him, and you may find a way back to my heart!" she cried, impulsively. A second gun sounded on the rising breeze, as Serge Maximoff thrust a letter into the châtelaine's hand.

"See! I trust you with my life! I dared not tell you all, until I knew your embittered heart had softened. Here in this letter you hold my life! You will understand my secret mission!

"For the sake of others, burn it! For my own sake I ask nothing! My heart is yours to tread under your feet! Karl von Geist yet shall make you forget the mad Serge Maximoff!"

He covered her hand with burning kisses, and strode away, a brave, self-reliant figure, a leader of men. There was a choking sob in Marie von Dornberg's throat; she struggled in vain to speak.

He turned and waved his hand in answer to the last whisper, which reached him, as clear as the silvery call of the muezzin at morn.

"Come back, Serge!" she had faltered, and von Geist murmured: "God! She is mine at last!" as he hastened down the stony way.

The stately Countess stood there alone until the yacht beat out into the foaming white-caps and stretched away toward the distant shores, where her enemies were hidden by the fringing Esthonian pines. The noble Ritter had conquered all hearts, but *one*.

The brooding Princess Zenaide, all that long afternoon, consulted her mysterious amulets with the quaint magic of her superstitious race.

"There is one who loves, and one who does not love!" she murmured. "One who keeps faith, and one who breaks it; and sorrow, flight, and sadness. And the face at the last is veiled. Whether Victory or Defeat, only the stars can tell."

Not all Zenaide's loving solicitude, nor even Olga Luboff's craft, could bring them to the presence of the woman who had a new secret to keep from her gallant son.

For, with a strange fluttering of the heart, Marie von Dornberg, locked in her chosen retreat, read over the lines which placed Ritter Karl von Geist's secret plans before her.

The sunset found her alone by the rocks, and she wistfully gazed out over the misty sea, where the "Aslauga" had vanished beyond the level rim, and she sat long pondering over the strange disclosure.

She had feared Karl von Geist's reawakened tenderness, but his agitation at their parting was the only sign that a living love still glowed under the ashes of life. He had held his ardent soul in skilful check.

"I will wait for your absolution, your pardon, your reinstatement, until I have earned it, Marie," he wrote. "Enough that your gentle eyes bid me hope for a final forgiveness of the error which has driven me away from you in all these lonely years.

"To forget you would be only to make my four years of heaven near you a lie, and my one expiation is to lay the heart, once at your feet, as a sacrifice on the altar of our common country. The tradition goes that a man is re-made every seven years.

"And so, I have been twice reincarnated, then, since

the passion you innocently waked swept me away from Reason's throne."

In the dying sunlight, Marie von Dornberg read over the able thesis of her strange lover, sketching every movement of the Russian octopus since the Moscow Slavophiles, in 1840, had attacked the German modelled system in vogue under the iron Nicholas, under the leadership of Juri Samarin.

Von Geist specified every movement to advance the Greek Orthodox Church under Nicholas' tyranny, and to crush "*nos amis, les ennemis*," the Lutheran and Catholic nobles of Oestland and the Baltic.

Every insidious move of the tyrant who so long delayed giving to Finland its Diet, every step in breaking down the liberties of Courland, Livonia, and Esthonia, was painted there; and Marie, the Queen of the Island Kingdom, marvelling at his dangerous trust in her fidelity, murmured: "His words are written in living fire!"

Her whole soul leaped up in arms to battle for the endangered noblesse.

The downfall of Count Stackelberg, the stern rule of General Golowin, and the "crushing-out" policy was well painted.

Suworoff's futile friendship, and Bibikoff's "Natural Mission" work, too, were recounted.

The crusade of the "Moscow Gazette" and Samarin's "Russian Frontiers" were all recalled, with the sentence of the extermination of the defiant nobles of the Oestland, holding to the pledged honor of the great Peter and their ancestral Hauseatic privileges.

Von Geist pointed out the forcible introduction of the Russian language, the gradual extinction of the old fiefs, the gagging of the press, and the forcing upon the people of Muscovite churches and schools.

The hegira of young Russian propagandists in '63 and '64, filling up the land with a swarm of official locusts, was described, and the present was ably summed up.

"Final destruction awaits us all! What is the remedy? Only that Resistance to tyrants which is obedience to God!" It was the declaration of a rebel!

"We need a leader for the Oestland nobility. That leader, to be guided by you, is your son. Will you give him to your country—to God?"

"In the name of 'One faith, one creed, one people,' the Czar seeks to efface the Baltic Provinces, as Russia has erased the name of Poland from the map of Europe!"

Marie von Dornberg, startled, cried: "Oh, my God! The last of his race! To what am I to send him? To the icy wastes of Siberia, or to the gallows?"

But she read the last lines with a newly born faith in Karl von Geist: "My fortune, my life, my very honor is embarked even now, beyond recall, in the new secret order of the 'Brotherhood of the East.'"

"I am to lead that, and, with the nobles marshalled by your son, we will surely win, for, behind me, stalks the spectre of the German Emperor with a million armed men at his heels!"

The Countess scarcely dared to breathe, as she read the audacious plan. Was there to be help in the gleam of Prussian bayonets?

"Imperial Germany is never safe with Russian modern Poland thrown out as a fortified bastion, into the heart of Prussia. To rectify the old line from Lemberg to Memel, Wilna and Reval, as the Brotherhood of the East, we can count on every despoiled Pole, Dane, German, Lithuanian, Courlander, and Esthonian.

"In Poland, to-day, the vast ancient possessions of the Knights of Malta are all held by the Czar's creatures, who have received them from the Russian Emperor, now, by a scurvy trick, the titular head of the Knights of Malta, save the obscure Spanish branch.

"These court gallants have married the Polish heiresses and widows, who are as unstable and flickering in their affections as their Polish husbands and lovers have been hot-headed and untrue to each other.

But, the common people are with us. The great Polish nobles are either exiles, or else have been seduced by Russian tinsel or exported to Siberia.

"As an officer of the Knights of Malta, I defy even the Czar himself to send me out of the Baltic Provinces. I will direct the movements of the Catholic branch of the defeated Slavs in this way.

"As to Austria, which has given a secure home to the Teutonic Knights, I hold the highest rank in that proud order, next to an Austrian Grand Duke, who is now its head.

"From Reval to Memel, I have my secret agents, the true-hearted descendants of that splendid order which, coming home from Jerusalem, united with the Livonian Knights of the Sword, in 1225, when the standard was first displayed at Dobjin.

"And the glorious order, so cemented by Albert d'Apeldern, once dominated Prussia and owned these very Baltic Provinces for four hundred years.

"Christian of Olivka lives again in me! Austria and Prussia are both secretly desirous of restoring these stolen provinces to the descendants of the brave warrior-monks who, under Konrad of Poland, became hereditary nobles and were then permitted to marry. It is the cause of God, Freedom, and Right!

"It is to the children of the great Teutonic Knights that the German Emperor would restore these vast domains now enjoyed by hungry Russian satellites. I have bought Weissenstein, where, armed with my doubly secret powers, I can successfully combat the brutal new Russian Propaganda of Destruction.

"In a few months, I will have fifty thousand scattered adherents ready to make a demonstration. You see that I can rally all the Baltic nobles under a secret agreement of mutual resistance to Russian tyranny.

"Germany will move its armies, if our united rights are attacked, as the noblest descendants of the Teutonic Knights are now married into the proudest German and Austrian families.

"I only ask you to make your son the leader of these bold nobles. I will only accept him at your own hands.

"When I return as your guest, after he has broken my bread, I shall read in your eyes whether the lion heart of the Swede is roused in your own still glowing breast!"

When Max von Dornberg returned to keep his tryst with the trembling-hearted Nadine Valdor, whose happy soul was now breaking out in the joyous song of hidden love, he saw the shadow of some great secret brooding in his stately mother's eyes.

"She is fit to be a queen—the mother of heroes—and to lead the Blue and Yellow Brigade," he proudly said to himself, as he folded her to his heart, for the gathering of the noblesse had fired his heart with all the ardor

of his Berserker blood. The leaven was working in his restless soul.

And, happy, he wandered with Nadine, while Love took up the glass of Life. Only Olga Luboff and Zenaïde the Circassian waited and watched!

The one to guard the new Adam and Eve in this little island Paradise, and the other to earn the right to bring the passionate Ivan Gorski once more to her feet. And so, Good and Evil strove blindly against each other.

While the fates were weaving, weaving, at the Château Dornberg, there was a princely revel at Weissenstein.

Karl von Geist had, at parting, bidden Max to come to him upon his call.

"There will be only Casimir Pulawy, his lovely cousin Countess Arline, and two or three of our Oestland nobles, whom I have noted as your mother's special friends." It was a genial and a brotherly invitation.

Count von Dornberg had carelessly handed Karl von Geist's informal letter to his mother to read, when the mail-boat brought the news of the Governor-General's arrival at Weissenstein. The letter was artfully written to reach the wavering woman's heart.

While Max, with Nadine and Zenaïde, explored the quaint nooks of the island, Marie von Dornberg studied over Karl von Geist's strange disclosure.

Her first impulse had been to burn the dangerous document, but the disclosure was so thrilling, the plan so far-reaching, that she wore the document long upon her heart, while pondering over its possible verification.

"My son! To give him, the last of the von Dornbergs!" She shuddered as she gazed at the picture of her husband, with the crossed swords of Field Marshal von Ehrenstein gleaming beneath it, with his battle helmet there. Max was the last jewel of his line.

With a sudden impulse, she took down one of the mailed gauntlets of the old Knight, and thrust the treasured document therein. "I might lose it! It might be stolen!" she murmured.

In her study, she dreamed a day over the mighty project to unite all disaffected Livonia, Courland, and Esthonia under dual leaders, so linking the past and present, and, with the Poles in reserve, to call in the

hungry Prussians to roll back Russian aggression. A private conference with the three Oestland nobles who were to be von Geist's guests seemed to be the only safeguard for Max's future.

With a self-protective cunning, the Countess sent Olga Luboff away to Hapsal for a week, to purchase needed furbelows for the two happy beauties.

The "Aslauga" having landed the happy spy where Ivan Gorski could dream with her over their coming glories, then swiftly raced away down to Pernau and Arensburg.

The grizzled Baron Waldeck of Pernau, Count von Solms of Oesel, and Graf von Mollwitz of Runae, marvelled at the sealed letter delivered to each by the wary Intendant Alexei Patkul.

But, Baron Waldeck, chief of the Triennial Assembly of Nobles at Arensburg, left the Château de l'Ordre at the simple summons, "Come to me secretly."

And the white-winged racer brought them soon, incognito, to Château Dornberg.

The simple-hearted Max wondered at the long conferences in the library between his mother and these grave border chiefs.

The details of the reception of the Czarewitch were the ostensible purpose of this secret cabal. For, in a fortnight the rising sun of Russia was to beam upon the simple Hapsal folk!

With a wildly beating heart, Marie von Dornberg learned of the absolute dominion of von Geist over the new "Brotherhood of the East."

"I am asked to give up to him my son, blindly!" cried the Countess.

The nobles, with bated breath, admitted that Ritter Karl von Geist united the tremendous influences of the two historic orders in his person, and was, with a secret Council, the organizing autocrat of the rapidly extending order.

"Your son must either lead the nobles, or else abdicate the family precedence enjoyed for centuries.

"We are to open the first chapter at Weissenstein, after Prince Katkoff has left to conduct the Grand Duke from Reval to Hapsal. Your son shall not take the oaths of membership until you know all from us." It was a turning-point of Life's dangerous paths.

"And so, you have then long awaited the Ritter's arrival?" demanded the excited woman.

"It has been the secret propaganda of years," replied Waldeck. "Von Geist made himself secretly known to everyone of us as our chief, at your fête.

"And so, for years he has watched your son's rising career abroad, in order to throw the mantle of a past personal friendship around their closer acquaintance here.

"We have already a secret express from Pernau to Weissenstein for our letters, and even now, von Geist has gathered fifty stanch henchmen around him. There is not a single Russian on his whole estate.

"The Château de Boris was purchased secretly to suit our purposes some time ago." The whole way seemed straight now.

"And, what are these purposes in detail?" eagerly cried Marie von Dornberg.

"That you must only know from Max, after his initiation," said Graf Mollwitz.

"He can trust you as his mother; we dare not divulge more until his life, fortune, and honor are gaged like our own."

"And you will watch over him at Weissenstein?" said the Lady of the Isles, her heart swelling with all a woman's tender forebodings.

"As our lives; we swear it!" was the chorus.

"Then," she solemnly said, "I give him to his country, to the past, present, and future, if he sees the way to take these oaths in honor!" And they knelt and kissed her trembling hands.

By nightfall the "Aslauga" skimmed on past Dago, and, crossing the Stele Sound, landed the astonished nobles at the northern spit of Oesel Island. They wondered at the secret knowledge possessed of all the plot to throw the vast army of Germany against the onrolling Muscovite tide.

"Be steadfast, brothers," said Count Solms. "This noble woman gives to us her only son as the forfeit of her prudence."

And at their parting, by different paths, they made their way over to Weissenstein to dream in the grand old woods over a new birth of their ancient liberties. The Oestland Chief of the new order was now selected for good or ill.

Marie von Dornberg sat long alone in a silent judgment upon the dead Serge Maximoff. He seemed to have vanished out of her life. "He has not lied to me," she mused. "He holds the whole border noblesse in his hands!

"He seems the Mahomet of a new dispensation. Each of the men, staking life and fortune on his truth, have pondered over the horrors of Siberia and walked in the shadow of the gallows!"

That no one recalled Major Serge Maximoff, the dashing aide-de-camp of the Reval Governor-General, was easily explained by the olden haughty avoidance of all Russian officials by the sea-girt island lords.

Karl von Geist's easy mastery of the Russian formalities in taking possession of his new domain seemed to be thoroughly made clear to her now.

"He shall face me after Max has broken his bread. I will read his eyes, his face, and sound his heart. And I will keep his letter," murmured Marie von Dornberg. "If we go down in this battle, he shall bear the brunt of it, with Max at his side.

"And I will go to Arensburg and have Waldeck call his friends again before me. When all the noblesse are embattled for our cause, Max shall be no recreant."

And she waited, in suspense, now to see once more the man whose mad passion had darkened the first days of her loneliness in the dead years.

The wily Master of Weissenstein was a keen student of the complex woman-nature. He had chosen to let Marie von Dornberg burden her heart with the secret that Serge Maximoff lived again in Karl von Geist.

"It is a flattery to her womanly nature to hold the past over me. She will never break the seal of the old days.

"And, once that all are within my power, I see the current which will drift her helpless back to my arms. She shall live to know that Serge Maximoff's burning love never died. And, ruling me in the growing burden of our hidden past, she shall come out to me in all her loving self-surrender, for the first step toward me she has taken in guarding my secret!" The Ritter's steady eyes gleamed in a coming triumph which warmed his snaky heart.

It was a dazzling scene which met the eyes of the delighted *convives*, when the Ritter von Geist stood upon the marble esplanade of Boris' Château to welcome the haughty General Prince Katkoff as the cortege drove up the great avenue of primeval oaks, a fête which revived the bravest boyar days.

A chorus of French horns sounded lusty peals as the stern-faced Governor strode up the broad steps to the grand arched doorway, leaning upon his host's arm.

Behind him, the lustrous-eyed Casimir Pulawy escorted the bewitching woman who was now the boast of all Reval.

For, Grafyn Arline Pulawy had already cast the spell of her seductions over the stern soldier who ruled the border in the Czar's name.

A dozen gallant staff officers marshalled fair guests from the Katherinenthal as they entered the great hall, where a concealed orchestra sounded the Russian National hymn. Two-score of lovers' hearts beat on in the ardent rapture of anticipated bliss.

On through lines of liveried servants, past rows of mailed figures, marshalled there, lance in hand, the delighted guests passed into the superb state drawing-rooms. The black-and-white cross of the Teutonic Knights shone out upon the funereal black armor of one rank of the silent warders, while the mailed figures on the other side wore the Maltese cross so bravely carried at Rhodes. It was the renaissance of a superb dead chivalry.

Splendid in his own quaint garb of a Knight of Malta, Ritter von Geist conducted Prince Nicolas Katkoff up the dais where once the mad Emperor Paul had watched his favorite Boris gloating over the beauty of an unresisting bride.

Every corner of the splendid state-rooms was decked with the superb portrait of a Czar, or the meek loveliness of a Czarina. The carven coat-of-arms of the Imperial family of the Romanoffs, jewelled and gilded, surmounted the chair of state reserved for the Czar's representative—the lip loyalty of the crafty, crouching under the iron heel of the Czar.

"Beside you, *mon Prince*," gallantly said von Geist, "I place the Queen of Beauty." He bowed low, and

kissing Arline Pulawy's finger-tips, led her to the place to which Prince Katkoff's burning eyes invited her. There was a storm of cheers!

It was Prince Fedor Lazareff who presented the score of Esthonian nobles who had gathered to do honor to their official chief, and his bold black eyes then insolently sought Arline Pulawy's gaze as she smiled down on the liegemen of her haughty secret protector, Nicolas Katkoff. Beauty and Power exchanged meaning glances, and Power nodded and surrendered to the loveliness of woman throned there.

The man who had rubbed Aladdin's lamp, himself conducted his princely guest to the state guest-rooms, before the silver trumpets gave out their signal to the banquet. "You are the one Master here, *mon Prince*," he simply said.

And, with a meaning smile, he secretly handed to Graf in Arline Pulawy, when he retired from her presence, a little golden key. "There is a secret passage," he whispered, "and, the key to Paradise is now your own!" The startled beauty dropped her eyes before his ardent glances.

When the doors of the marble theatre were thrown open, a chorus of delight arose as the banquet was unveiled, in all its glory of Oriental magnificence.

Seated with his two principal guests at either side, Karl von Geist then told them the story of Boris's old château, while the bright wine sparkled in silver foam.

"You have seen all the beauties of this wild old domain as you were driven across its vast expanse.

"Forty versts square, it is one of the most notable estates in the Oestland. My huntsmen tell me that the forest is now swarming with elk, bison, boar, and deer.

"Bear and wolves await your guns, *mes chevaliers*, and to each gallant hunter, a beautiful guest must bring good luck in the battue. I shall expect you all to choose your hunting companions at the ball to-night."

"Prince Lazareff is to be the Master of Ceremonies, and on him alone no fair lady's eyes must beam." The sinuous Polish queen of hearts smiled and softly fingered her golden key, while Lazareff bent toward her with an air of mock despair.

"*J'attendrai!*" he whispered, as her ophidian eyes dared him to test his audacity.

They explored each other's speaking eyes while von Geist told the story of Boris's folly.

"It was in the time of the Emperor Paul that 'Boris le Bossu' was known as the stanchest cavalier of the eccentric Czar's court. Brave, witty, and resolute, a splendid soldier, a grand seigneur, and a man of enormous wealth, he was one of the nearest favorites of a sovereign who pitied him for Nature's ante-natal curse of deformity. For the humpbacked Croesus was the butt of the *beau sexe*.

"In vain the accomplished boyar sought death in the field; idly he dared the glittering swords of the duellists whose conceited malice had often maddened him.

"Foreign travel, play, with its mad delirium, even the wildest drinking bouts of those semi-barbaric days, failed to rouse him from his deep despair.

"It was with a cynic heart that the unfortunate noble suddenly quitted the glittering court, at the possible forfeit of his royal protector's favor, and then sought alone these Esthonian wilds. Here, in the forest shades, with a wild crew later captured, he lived only in the chase, for his life was embittered beyond measure. For women shunned the man who was, in all else, Fortune's spoiled child.

"He builded here this vast marble château, bringing troops of architects and cunning workmen even from far-off Italy. The peasants called this 'The Château of a Thousand Statues,' and to-day you will find the stormy-hearted Mars, and Venus with her crumbling arms, haunting the dells where only the bright-eyed deer gaze upon them. Boris so feasted his eyes upon the loveliness denied to him in life.

"An abrupt, imperative summons to return to the court, however, brought Count Boris Nelidoff back to the Winter Palace. With a pale brow and burning eyes, he lingered there, near his affectionate master, who was really concerned at the growing eccentricities of the 'mad Nelidoff.'

"After a grand court ball, one evening, the Czar, indulging in a listless wandering among the riotous love-makers, found Boris Nelidoff seated, sobbing, alone, with his head buried in his hands.

"The story was soon forced from the unhappy man.

"His stormy nature had been aroused by the surpassing beauty of Olga Orloff, the woman whose loveliness had given to her the name of the Queen of the Neva.

"And, with strangling sobs, the unfortunate Boris told of the pitying smile with which she had repelled the great noble's timid advances. 'That frightful creature, but half human!' the haughty beauty had murmured. 'Let him hide in his Esthonian woods with the fauns and satyrs!' and the bitter jeer had burned itself deeply into his broken heart.

"'There is a cure for love—but one, only one,' dryly answered the Lord of All the Russias. 'You will ride with me to-morrow, at ten!' And turning suddenly, he then left his unhappy courtier in a wondering stupor. For, Paul, the Czar, was both *farceur* and *bon diable*."

While the host paused to quaff a glass of Johannisberger, General Prince Katkoff's eyes sought the velvet love-darting glances of the watchful Polish beauty.

"All Petersburg knew before the next sunset that the imperious Czar had driven Count Boris to the palace of the Orloffs, but only a fainting, white-faced woman knew of the brief interview which sealed her own doom!

"'I demand your hand in marriage, Mademoiselle!' gravely remarked Paul the autocrat, with a meaning glance at her parents. 'Fate prevents me making you my beloved Czarina. You shall, however, be the wife of my best friend, and the wedding feast shall be held to-morrow night, in the white marble hall of the Winter Palace. Whom the Czar honors is the first in Russia, and I shall lead you out to the dance *myself*! I charge myself with your future fortunes!'

"There was horror painted in the young beauty's eyes as Paul placed her trembling white hand in Count Nelidoff's burning palm!

"'It is a sacrifice!' whispered the astonished cripple.

"'It is my will!' roughly cried Paul. 'Kiss your future husband; you shall chase away the fauns and satyrs from his Esthonian wilderness, and your beauty will make his home a Paradise!' The shuddering woman knew that Paul had 'marked her down.'

"It all seemed like a dream, the wild vision of a night, till the Emperor led Boris aside, when the dazzling Count had breathlessly watched the nuptials. 'I have

given her to you. The Czar can do no more. Go and try the only cure for love—marriage! You are no fool! Guard her well!’ And then, Boris le Bossu understood the Czar’s grim joke.

“*Guai à qui la toccherà!*” muttered the humpbacked Boris Nelidoff. ‘She is mine now, but the desert shall smile for her!’ While the hugely satisfied Paul told his boon companions how he had revenged the cold beauty’s sneering remark, Nelidoff led his bride away here.

“For her, he built this superb marble theatre; for her, he transformed the very face of nature. Theatre, opera, concert, a troop of lovely women attendants, the chase, the superb state of a royal château, a princely table, and all that wealth could lavish were at her orders. Only that satyr face gleamed close to her own!

“*Only!*” mockingly laughed von Geist, “no gallant cavalier ever strayed here in the moonlit glades with the lonely Countess! Her madly devoted husband had surrounded her with a guard of jealous women.

“In all these witching shades—the vast palm-gardens, the tropical greenhouses—there was no nook for a lover’s tryst; for a band of fierce Ukraine Cossacks ostensibly guarded the château from wolves! And Boris’s sword was keen and deadly, too!”

“And, the sequel?” whispered the fascinating Pole, her seductive eyes flashing out a challenge to the marble-faced host. She sorrowed with Olga Nelidoff!

“Ah! Love will always find the way!” cried Karl von Geist. “Paul died, and a new Czar ruled over the Winter Palace. The beautiful woman had bloomed out into a very marvel of loveliness. Her scheming family, raised by Paul to power and opulence, soon obtained an Imperial order for the Count and Countess to repair at once to Court!

“Not a murmur had ever escaped the woman’s crimsoned lips, but when, in all her splendor, she bowed before the new Czar, her eyes gleamed with an invitation which even a Romanoff could not resist!

“Her time had come. There were soon secret parleys, a Czar upon his knees, and a price was exacted and demanded for the ready smiles which the royal lover sued for.

"Count Boris was sent away upon a quest of years to the Caucasus; his matchless wife was given a post of honor which chained her near the new Czar. In her own family stronghold she was secure against even the wild rage of a jealous husband!" Von Geist laughed gayly.

"Before a year had passed, Olga Nelidoff was the power above the throne, and her dearly bought favor was the talisman in the hearts of a dozen of Russia's handsomest gallants. The revenge of all those lonely years in this same marble prison here was a career which frightened even the hardest-hearted coquettes of St. Petersburg. And so, outraged Love revenged itself.

"And thus, before the snow had whitened Kasbeck twice, Boris Nelidoff was found dead, with a still smoking pistol in his hand! He had scrawled on a silver dish, with his dagger, these words: 'There is but one cure for love—but one—only one! Death—and, here it is!'"

"And her fate?" hurriedly cried the Graf in Pulawy, as Karl von Geist smiled maliciously.

"A sudden death by poison, at the hands of a rival! The rumor of an unheard-of elevation concentrated upon the victorious northern Venus the hatred of all the fiery-hearted noble women of the court.

"As the Czar knelt by her side, after a private banquet, she feebly waved away the court physicians.

"*Laisse-moi tranquille!*" she muttered. "*J'en suis satisfaite! J'ai vécu, et tu ne m'a pas abandonné!*" It was the end of a wild life.

"Her son was made a Prince, and later, a Field Marshal of Russia. With a certain royal dignity, the natural son of the Czar refused to accept the Château de Boris. 'Let it go to the Crown!' he cried. 'There are no heirs.'

"Strange as it may seem," said von Geist, solemnly, "no woman's love has ever brightened this lonely Paradise. It has passed into my hands after the hush of fifty years, since the great doors of the noblest mansion of the Frontier Land were closed.

"Open to Loyalty, to Hospitality, I now give you the one toast dear to a Russian subject—'The Czar!'"

Prince Nicholas Katkoff arose with the gleaming golden cup in his hand.

He was a stern and martial figure in his rich General's uniform, his broad breast covered with decorations, and the blue sash of the Czar's gift gleaming over his sparkling diamonds.

The massive frame, the bullet-head, with its closely cropped hair, the fierce hussar mustache and piercing, round, black Tartar eyes, his high cheek-bones and massive jaw, with thin, pitiless lips—all showed the veteran voluptuary, the emblem of force, of craft, the darling of a heartless autocratic régime. For, Nicholas Katkoff was a heartless human wolf.

"In the name of the Czar!" he cried, as the vaulted marble roof rang to the shouts of the Esthonian nobles, led on by the wine-maddened Lazareff.

"I guard this Frontier Land until, when our fleets are dominant in the Baltic, when our millions are all trained in the later arts of war, the double-headed eagle shall soar over the three crowns, our hereditary enemies.

"Russia alone broke the vast power of Napoleon! 'La Grande Armée' was made food for the Russian wolves.

"Our ravens have whetted their beaks in the best blood of France! Denmark we overshadow by the marriage of our noble Grand Duke Heritier.

"But, Sweden and Norway are destined yet to be ours!

"First, Finland, then, the Baltic Provinces, and in a quarter of a century, the Russian flag, which never goes backward, shall wave from North Cape to Christiania, and from Stockholm to the White Sea! It is the natural destiny of Russia to conquer and extend. The whole Baltic must be ours!"

The haughty soldier paused, while the hidden orchestra played the national anthem. Then, with a glance of fiery intent, he hoarsely cried: "I give you Russia's pride, the power above all crowns—the one thing which makes Earth an Eden, and Life worth living—

"Woman and woman's Love!"

The little golden key tinkled to the floor as Countess Arline Pulawy smiled and kissed her cup, and handed it to the gallant Tartar.

"Let this be your reward!" she whispered, as Nich-

olas Katkoff leaned over and picked up the golden key with a crafty smile.

But, gazing around on the royal palace, Arline Pulawy was already dreaming dreams.

"His wealth must be inexhaustible! This Cossack General may lose the Czar's favor! Karl von Geist is an Aladdin! If I ruled here on the borders of Poland, I would be the peer of a queen!

"And this Lazareff, the Marechal de Noblesse, would rally the nobles around us. He is only a mad boy, and I could twist him around my finger. But, von Geist has the bearing of an Egmont." And she then craftily dreamed wild and brave dreams of new conquests. The story of Olga Nelidoff had borne fruit quickly in her ardent breast.

It was at the hour of midnight when the magnificent ball opened.

The hall of pictures was thronged with a joyous assembly, when Prince Katkoff and the Master of Weissenstein led the lovely Polish star to the place of honor under the portraits of the Czar and Czarina. There had been a triune conference as to the grand hunt of the morrow.

Arline Pulawy sat with downcast eyes as von Geist gravely said: "Our game is so wild in these long-unhunted wastes that I have given you six cool riflemen to be with you, General, at the post of honor.

"There might be some accident with a lady to disconcert your aim. I myself will guard the Countess in a booth, so arranged as to give her perfect safety, on another part of the line."

Katkoff bowed gloomily, while Arline Pulawy's eyes silently thanked her cautious host.

It was when the mad mazurka was on that von Geist sought Arline's side.

Seated on a raised dais, this witching woman of thirty-three, clad in a white silk royal robe, was the crowned queen of the mad revels.

Her dark, tender eyes gleamed softly over her pearl necklace; her insinuating, fleeting smile allured the faded passions of the cold conspirator, and the exquisite symmetry of her perfect form showed all the serpentine grace of that fickle and emotional Polish race whose hot blood coursed in her veins.

"You are not dancing, Grafin Arline," murmured von Geist.

With downcast eyes, she whispered: "I wished to speak to you. I have lost my little golden key!"

Karl von Geist darted one lightning glance into the slumbering, passionate eyes. "Mourn not," he sharply answered. "*I have another!*"

"But, mark me! Do not arouse Nicholas Katkoff's jealous rage! He is a devil! You can tame a young wildcat, like Fedor Lazareff. He is as wax in your hands. But Katkoff is a cruel-hearted Cossack—you know it?"

His breath was hot upon her cheek as he whispered: "He must go away in two days to Reval, to dance attendance upon the Czarewitch. There is no place for you around the Dagmar and her frozen-hearted lilies. Katkoff will be three weeks in attendance upon the Grand Duke. Will you be the queen of Weissenstein?"

The blood left her face pale as marble, as she gazed timidly at the distant Katkoff.

"I dare not enrage him! My cousin Casimir is in his power. Russia has despoiled the Pulawys, and only shock-headed Cossack officers hold revels now in our Polish castles! I must go back to Reval with him!"

"Listen, Arline!" pleaded von Geist. "I will guide you. You can shut yourself up as ill in your mansion in the Katharinenthal. Casimir will steal you out by night!"

"I shall watch Katkoff's every move. You can return here secretly! There will be a few chosen friends here while the Czarewitch opens his summer court. Fedor Lazareff's lickspittle and Katkoff's pander is in my power! There comes to me here Max von Dornberg—you remember that young viking at Reval?"

The serpent-woman's eyes glowed with a hungry fire. "Make him your very slave, and you shall rule here! Casimir has our secret password. I bought the jewels of the unhappy Olga Nelidoff, which her son would never touch. He knew that his father gave them as a lure. They shall be yours!"

In his hands a second little golden key trembled. "You were made to be my confidant, my other heart, my queen!"

"And," she panted, "I shall rule always here—if I work your will?"

"As long as a stone stands!" the bold Ritter pledged.

"He must not know!" shuddered Arline. "I am poor, and so helpless against him."

"I will fence you with gold!" impatiently cried von Geist.

"Give me the key!" she murmured. "I am yours to the death!"

And all the next day, at the hunt, Karl von Geist's gun lay idle as he gazed into the eyes of the serpent-woman at his side.

BOOK II.

WEAVING SPIDERS. .

CHAPTER VI.

MAX AND ARLINE READ THE BOOK OF LOVE.

Marie von Dornberg's heart was stormy as she watched the royal yacht "Polar Star" steam past her pine-clad crags with two great Russian war vessels creeping cautiously along past Worms, escorting the Imperial pleasure-boat.

With a moody brow, she listened to the thundering salutes as the great leviathans anchored out in the narrow channels for sea-going vessels, the one cutting off all approach from the north, and the other, sealing the southern sound.

"The doom of our liberties!" she muttered, as the dull-booming guns smote upon her ears.

But, a new hope was born in her heart as she watched the returning "Aslauga."

"There may be news of the new Brotherhood!" she proudly cried, her secret thrilling her royal bosom. "While they feast, our friends are busily working to build inside their lines!" She knew now the whole artful plan of the Baltic hereditary nobles—an organized secret resistance!

The chivalrous old Count de Bellegarde would soon give a magnificent summer fête, throwing open all his gardens, the château, and even the old castle, to the hereditary nobles.

And all the old families, marshalled by him, would be formally presented to the Czarewitch and his charming Consort.

"Nadine and Zenaide will be safe under my eyes," she thought. "I will have my own noble son at my side. Lazareff will be surely cowed in the Imperial presence.

"Our lip-loyalty once satisfied, with General and Excellence Dragonoff to aid me, I can then return here with my young beauties, while Max goes on to Weissenstein with the secret friends of the new cult.

"He will be guarded by them, and on their secret report, when they all return, I will be able to decide whether the old enemy, Serge Maximoff, is really dead, and only the new friend, Karl von Geist, lives to aid in ransoming our heritages! If he keeps his faith before Max takes up his leadership then he shall come back here and receive him at my hands, with the guarantee of Waldeck, Solms, and Mollwitz!"

She hastily retired to her room, when Olga Luboff returned, happy at heart, and delivered a sealed letter from von Geist, which her lover Gorski had given into her special charge.

The three young people lingered happily over the post-bag, but Zenaide, the Circassian, was not deceived.

While Max and Nadine, now blind in their growing self-engrossment, dallied over the plans of the coming Bellegarde fête, Aida stole away to her tower.

"It must be so!" the true-hearted girl mused. "Olga's letter was from him! And so, there are undercurrents in the smoothest lives! I see it all! The Countess has not married simply to increase her son's estate and to keep him still Lord of the Isles.

"But she sent her old lover out to the Continent to secretly make her son his friend, and so the dark secret of her weak woman-heart is buried out of sight! For these two lives have run together before, and each of them has now a secret to hide from Max and Nadine. It is the way of the restless human heart—the way of sweet sinning!

"But, I will be dumb!" mused the child of Schamyl. "Perhaps Max may even please the Grand Duke. He may be given a good place at court. And Nadine's great fortune would gild their union. I will speak myself to dear old Dragonoff; he will surely aid me. But I dare not even whisper that I have surprised this secret

of a woman's heart! Alas! how fond and feeble women are!"

There was a letter from General Dragonoff which greatly touched the haughty captive. "You are as dear to us now, Zenaide," he wrote, "as the precious life which we gave up for you, and among all the brave nobles of the Grand Duke's suite you must surely find a heart worthy to beat against your own."

All the strange past was now wafted back to her.

"Love—the strange love that rules all! Shall the cup be held to my lips by a foeman's hands?" Her childish memories brought sad tears to her eyes. She saw again the gallant Dimitri Dragonoff as he drove away the brutal Russian soldiery who had seized her in the sack of her castled mountain home.

Her rebellious heart softened as she recalled that wild ride down the mountain-side from the flaming village, the roar of the ringing guns, the screams of the dying, and the lurid light bursting from the windows of her tottering ancestral home.

In all the agony of a child's terror, she clung to the young Major's breast, as she rested on the soft folds of his cloak, folded over the pommel of his Cossack saddle.

And she saw, then, all the terrors of the Russian camp, with its wild, bearded soldiery. Her last memories were of one walking by the litter wherein she was borne by four Cossacks, down through the passes to where rest, care, and nursing awaited her in a Russian-General's field-headquarters.

It was only when she became a woman, at the Catherine Institute, that the stern old Michel Dragonoff told her of the long and desperate illness engendered by the polluted air of the Circassian stronghold, where her wild kinsmen had fought behind the bodies of their dead brothers.

The little captive eaglet had thrived in the hands of her captors, and she knew not for long years that her savior had died under the poisoned breath of the caressing kisses of the affrighted child.

For the camp typhus had slain the brave Dimitri Dragonoff, the man whom the flashing sabres of the Tcherkess had spared.

Zenaide, the fatherless and motherless child, the

princely orphan without a name, fled away in a gust of passionate tears to her own room, where Dimitri Dragonoff's portrait, set in diamonds, hung over her couch, wreathed with the mystic necklace of amulets.

There was the soldier's battle-sword, and his last letter to his brother Michel, penned with his trembling fingers.

A lock of fair hair, which had often waved in the smoke of battle, was framed with the letter whose last words always touched her lioness's heart.

"Tell the little one to remember, if she grows to be a woman, that I die for her willingly. And she must not forget that a true Russian does not war on women. I am the innocent sacrifice for her murdered kinsmen. If honor had not held me in the ranks, I would have drawn my own sword with Schamyl, the stout-hearted hero, defending his peaks under the inspiration of a God-given liberty!"

"It was Kismet!" sobbed Zenaide. "Dimitri! Saint Dimitri! I will never forget you!"

And then, she dashed off an affectionate letter to the Dragonoffs, who had taken to their heart the child for whom the star of young chivalry had died. She was the legacy of a noble self-devotion.

There were tears in General Dragonoff's frosty eyes, as well as the gentler lights gleaming under his Hélène's silver hair, when they read the wild-natured young girl's answer. For, so far, no man had conquered her defiant, stainless nature.

"Find me a man like the dead Dimitri, and I will marry him. For Allah's creation goes no further than he who lays down his life for the helpless orphan. But Russia had but one Dimitri Dragonoff! Let my fate come to me. I will not hurry the purposes of the one God!"

It was an anxious evening in the old château of Dornberg.

They had all gathered in the great drawing-room to discuss the now risen sun of social splendor. The Imperial visit was an event of years.

"De Bellegarde writes that the Grand Duke wishes to try and endear himself to our people," said the Lady of the Isles. "There is but one company of guards kept

on duty at the mansion, and the Dragoons and Paul Regiment are all cautioned out of the way at Parallup, and in the fields a league away to the north.

"Special orders have been given to allow all the usual summer privileges to boats and yachts. There is to be no sign of imperial pomp, save the aide-de-camps of the Czarewitch, and the Grand Duchess and her little family go to the beautiful bathing pavilion on the Esplanade, being quartered as simply as the ordinary wealthy boyar family.

"After the grand formal assembly of the officials and Russian noblesse, directed by Prince Lazareff, the Lord of Hapsal will give his fête to present the whole Oestland aristocracy to the man who will soon be their Czar.

"All obnoxious orders have been relaxed, and the Grand Duke wishes to contribute to the season's genial enjoyment by mingling *sans cérémonie*, as far as his exalted rank will allow."

"When does de Bellegarde's fête occur?" thoughtfully asked Count Max, looking up from a letter.

"In three weeks," answered his mother.

"Then, I will have plenty of time to visit von Geist at Weissenstein. He writes me that Prince Katkoff and his whole suite left a week ago to meet the Czarewitch. Our friends Waldeck, Solms, and von Mollwitz are asked over there to meet me. Shall I accept? Did you hear from von Geist?" It was a frankly direct question.

Princess Zenaide was startled as Countess Marie calmly answered, "No," and then concluded: "You can surely make your promised visit best while the official clique are busy with the Grand Duke. I will give you letters to our three friends, and a formal note asking the Ritter von Geist to return with you for a quiet sojourn here.

"He is an interesting man, and has promised to tell me the story of the three old orders—the Porte Glaives, the Knights of Rhodes, and the Teutonic Orders. It seems that they are all to be given a new lease of life, through the concurrence of the Emperor of Germany, the Austrian Kaiser, and the Czar!"

The Circassian caught a gleam of sly triumph from Olga Luboff's eyes, and it stirred her watchful and loyal

heart. "Even this underling knows that the proud Countess deceives her son!" Aida had seen the black cross sealed on the envelope, and recognized the peculiar handwriting of their guest, who had courteously copied for her, in the library, a rare old Polish love-song. For all arts and graces lived in the all-round talents of the disguised Maximoff.

Something choked the proud Circassian as she rose and fled away to hide her telltale blushes. The last month was made plain now in its artful manœuvres. She had wondered at Countess Marie's blindness to the growing love idyl.

For Max and Nadine were as frankly unsuspicious as Paul and Virginia, and only the engrossing hidden passion of Countess Marie for her old lover could explain her apparent indifference to the daily welding of the two young hearts, in this wooing May-time, when all nature was in its flower and bloom. The Lady of the Isles had her own burning passion to hide. It stirred the girl's heart with an infinite pity.

But the coarse gloating of Olga Luboff over the Countess's secret correspondence with the new Aladdin, Ritter Karl von Geist, had suddenly opened the rebellious Circassian's eyes. There was danger ahead now!

"Here is a web of mad intrigue!" she mused, as she looked out from her lonely tower upon the inviolate sea throbbing there beneath her. She could hear the dashing of the wild waves upon the sharp-fanged crags, and a mad unrest possessed her. "These Russians! What mad lovers! What strangely disordered lives!" she sighed.

"They speak to me now of marriage with a Russian! This opulent stranger who leaps into the front rank of the border patricians with a bound is surely a Russian. For I saw him lingering long with Ivan Gorski, who is the Luboff's shadow. And she brought this secret letter. It came not in the open mail. Von Geist is at his castle. Then, either Lazareff or Gorski gave it to her at Hapsal.

"She, my governmentally named companion, is a Russian, and Marie von Dornberg trusts to her and lies to her son!

"If I cannot warn Max and Nadine, I can at least

watch this Russian snake, who has been warmed in my bosom! It shall be a duel to the death, Olga Luboff, between you and me!

"I shall battle for Max and Nadine, and in silence!

"For to Max I dare not speak of his mother's darling sin. Nadine is as simple as a child, and, my God! I pray not! the Countess may soon be in the power of this cold, stern mystery who plays the Haroun al Raschid now at Weissenstein!"

Over the samovar, that night, Zenaide learned of Max's departure on the morning tide, and, strangely, too, of Olga Luboff's return to Hapsal to execute some forgotten commissions, and then her own plan of action was silently made. "I will outwit them all, yet!" she muttered, in a new resolve.

When the "Aslauga" was ready to cast off, at dawn, with "blushes more than beauty bright," Nadine Valdor lingered on the deck with her new confidant, Max von Dornberg, while Princess Zenaide came bounding down the rocks like a young fawn.

She confided her own letters to the love-enchanted Max, who, with eager eyes, standing there, longed for the last words of a lover, and then she drew Olga Luboff aside to the bow of the vessel. She carelessly addressed the bewildered Olga:

"The Countess forgot to notice whether she had sealed her letter to the Ritter von Geist. The one you are to give to Gorski. Quick! Let me see it! No one must know!" And then, with an air of deep concern, the Circassian gazed upon the document which Olga Luboff drew from her bosom. "Yes, it is safely sealed! Remember, not a word!" And Zenaide pressed a rosy finger to her lips.

Olga Luboff had defiantly hesitated for a moment. But, she wisely reflected that the Czar would surely keep up Princess Zenaide's state for a lifetime.

It was the *noblesse oblige* of a sovereign who had ruthlessly stolen the lands of the great Tcherkess families and dedicated them to the Crown funds by the sweep of a bloody sword.

"She is my fortune; these Oestland nobles may be driven out like rats from a sinking ship by the coming deluge. For the Russian wave, sooner or later, rolls over

all!" Her own interests lay in pleasing the Czar, the official protector of Zenaide.

And the woman who looked forward to soon queening it in a province as Madame la Générale Ivan Gorski, yielded, for well she knew the fierceness of the young Eagle of Kasbeck when roused. No one had ever openly braved the Tcherkess girl.

"My time will come!" smiled Olga Luboff, as the white-winged yacht sped away, with the gallant, soldierly Max waving adieu to the two graceful beauties lingering on the rocky shore.

And then she turned away to gaze toward Hapsal, with all the fierce tide of her passionate love bounding in her veins. "I will soon see Ivan again, and he will strain me to his breast! This liaison puts them both in our power—the Countess and that Monte Cristo, von Geist!" For Olga Luboff was now alive to her mean advantage.

But the Princess Zenaide, in these first days of the absence of Count Max, was as alert in camping upon the trail of her secret enemies, the foes of the two young lovers, as a young Pawnee upon his first war-path, hungering for the scalp of a Sioux warrior and fingering his unnotched coup-stick.

At far-away Weissenstein the toils were now all set, and the cup of Circe was being brewed.

When Count Max von Dornberg, from a brief rest at Château Bellegarde, went jingling on his way through the fragrant forest, drawn by four wild post-horses, he little dreamed that the lonely rider who dashed past him bore a secret advance letter to his traitorous host from the mother who bore him.

A woman whose pent-up patriotism had suddenly leaped into a flame of fierce enthusiasm for the new sacred cause!

While Countess Marie took up the threads of her interrupted heart-commune with Nadine, the Princess Zenaide craftily instructed the one subordinate in the house whom she could trust.

Tatiana Pashkof, the head maid of Countess Marie, was a comely Russian woman in the bloom of her early womanhood. And to her, stout Alexei Patkul, the Intendant, bowed down in a slavish adoration.

Bit by bit the fair Circassian conspirator drew out the story of Olga Luboff's loving subjection to the burly Colonel of Police. "You shall be made rich for life, Tatiana," soberly said Zenaide; "and I will set you up, when you marry Patkul, if you watch this Luboff woman for me, by night and day!" The rosy Muscovite country lass adored the spirited patrician, and, with all the dog-like fidelity of her caste, she kissed the hem of her new patroness's robe.

"Alexei tells me all! You love the young master and the darling Barina Nadine. So do I, and I will be a fox of the Ukraine! Trust to me; you shall know all!" The maid's bright eyes gleamed with the fire of an honest devotion.

The Princess Zenaide was, however, but half satisfied at heart. "If I could only know of the daily life at Weissenstein! But there is no woman in that gloomy Paradise, haunted with the story of all a woman's slow progress from fairy to fiend! What does he there—this stony-faced Machiavelli? I will yet get within his lines!

"For Olga Luboff, too, is blinded with Gorski's love-charms, and I shall see the battle from the rear; but I will have my own hand in the fight yet! My God! If Countess Marie would only trust to me!"

Zenaide's clear eyes saw that something deeper than mere slavish passion was now carving lines upon the brow of the woman whose fair fame had never been smirched. Was it the thrall of some olden weakness?

"Is it love or fear?" Zenaide gloomily murmured. "Is it the love which, at the last, becomes a galling chain, a band of scorching fetters, or the fear of her son's judgment upon the guilty past?"

The loyal girl never dreamed that the purest love on earth—a mother's love—was leading Marie von Dornberg down into a dark tangle, at the clarion call of a fanatic patriotism, the legacy of her Viking forefathers!

But the man who would fain "seethe the kid in its mother's milk" had laughed merrily as the most noble Prince Nicolas Katkoff paused upon the great marble steps of Boris Château to thank his host for a royal entertainment.

The hunt supper had been a mighty festival, and the

sons of Nimrod looked passionately into the eyes of the debonnaire beauties of Reval who had seen many a grizzled bear, foaming boar, and stately stag of ten go down before the rifles of their hardy cavaliers. A royal sport!

The torchlight breaking up of the deer, the hunters' chorus of French horns, the wild music of the peasant singers, and the impromptu hunt ball had sent both gallant and lady sighing sadly over vanished joys to their rooms, for the rosy daybreak was to bring the parting hour.

The bewitching Grafin Arline Pulawy had sung her last wild, impassioned song, and Casimir Pulawy had escorted his fair kinswoman to her state apartments, when General Katkoff, with passion-laden eyes, drew von Geist into the silence of a little alcove. The two men distantly understood each other's scorn of all social precautions.

There was no one but low-browed peasant hinds to gossip in these wild Esthonian woods, and both the magnates were wifeless.

La Princess Katkoff had died, a butterfly exile in Paris, many a long year ago.

"I have thought of a plan to relieve your Excellency of the sneaking social spies of Reval," smoothly said von Geist, when the Prince murmured his wish "to come again," but, if possible, "incognito."

Prince Katkoff narrowly watched his Mephisto's grave face, for well he knew that his secret had been betrayed to his keen-eyed host. And even then the lustrous-eyed woman who secretly ruled the Czar's vicegerent in the Frontier Land was laughing above them at the snares made of the meshes of Delilah's silken hair. Arline, the bewitching Polish beauty, was now a Venus Victrix.

"I am alone in the world. I have no women visitors here," bluntly said von Geist. "The château is yours, whenever you will. You can easily observe the travel from Reval and Kegel hither. The limits of the estate are carefully guarded by my men.

"There is only one man—Colonel Gorski—at Hapsal who, as Chief of Police, could send his secret agents over here! Gorski is ambitious! He might try to un-

dermine you! Let this spirited young fellow, Casimir Pulawy, be named Chief of Police by you for Weissenstein! You can send him a half-dozen of your private body-guard.

"All that is required is your written order, directing him to report to you in person. You can then have your adjutant notify Colonel Gorski of the order.

"And then, no human being can ever pass the lines of the estate without your personal knowledge. I will have a private telegraph line laid to Kegel, and you can personally communicate with me."

Prince Katkoff was glowing with delight. "I will have the appointment sealed and registered to-night! Send your butler for Count Casimir. I will bring the papers myself from the adjutant." It was a snug, covered way for love's soft dalliance.

The Ritter Karl smiled as he softly said, "I have a handsome hunting-lodge below, as here, in the Stag's Run.

"When you wish to breathe the forest air in peace, bring over your own party. My Intendant shall obey Pulawy, and you know that you can trust to him.

"I can make my headquarters at the lodge, so as not to embarrass your visits. And in this way the gossips of Reval are baffled—as well as Gorski, who is at best a vain fool!"

And so it fell out that when Prince Katkoff entered his splendid britska, ready for the road, on the lovely May morning of his departure, he had forgotten to return the little golden key which once had trembled in the passionate hand of a Czar of Russia. The Ritter von Geist was jubilant.

"It is our secret, von Geist," muttered Nicolas Katkoff. "You shall have my *carte blanche*!" the grateful Governor-General heartily said. "Here is a blank passport in my name, already sealed for you with a general visé, 'upon the Czar's private business,' and a royal Podrovnja, which gives to your messengers all the Imperial courier privileges.

"Chief of Police Count Pulawy will have his seals and papers sent to him, and you can then issue passports to all your own dependents through him.

"I will send Pulawy back to you, to tell you when I

can come, and he will bring you a battalion of soldiers to build your telegraph line in a week—as a military branch.”

It was a supreme test of nerve when the Ritter von Geist took his adieu of the beautiful veiled queen of Weissenstein.

Nestled in her carriage, her eyes met his in one mute, glowing appeal, and then she silently kissed a golden key which she had drawn from her bosom.

“*À bientôt!*” she whispered, her crimsoned lips parted like the petals of a tropic flower, and then Serge Maximoff lived again.

As he bent over her hand he murmured, kissing it with burning lips, “You shall rule forever here—as long as love throbs in your heart!”

With a smile which left him breathless in its insidious self-surrender, the beauty sank back in her carriage, and then followed the haughty fool who fondled the golden key. There was a snaky triumph in her flashing eyes.

There was a gleam of savage satisfaction on Casimir Pulawy’s face as he crushed von Geist’s hand in his sinewy grasp.

“We are invincible, when our trinity is completed!” he hoarsely whispered, eyeing the disappearance of His Excellency, General Prince Nicolas Katkoff, followed by a cloud of Cossacks, his britska surrounded with a dozen brilliant staff officers.

“Once that the police seal is in my possession, we can give a legal passport and road permit to everyone of our secret brotherhood! I shall bring her back to you, never fear! And I will have all his movements daily reported from Hapsal!

“Arline is a very serpent of craft, and he is as wax in her hands! She can reach Reval always, before he could suddenly return, and I have Doctor Vogelsdorf, a stanch comrade of the Star of Poland, there to certify to her illness.”

“He must not be undeceived, Casimir,” sharply said Karl von Geist, keenly regarding the bevy of envious beauties soon leaving for Hapsal and Reval under the chivalric escort of Prince Lazareff and Major Dachkof of the Garde à Cheval. “How can you spirit her out of the Katherinenthal?”

Casimir Pulawy laughed merrily. "Arline rides like a Hetman of the Don Cossacks. And she always prefers a man's dress for riding. I will bring her out at night. Many a long day have we ridden the Polish wood-paths together *en chasseur*, for she was the girl-witch of the insurrection of '63! Alas! She lived only for Poland then," sighed the world-worn adventurer.

"And now?" curiously demanded Karl von Geist.

"Now," sententiously replied the new Chief of Police of Weissenstein, "she lives for herself!"

"Then," gayly replied von Geist, "she has found out the *ultima thule* of human sagacity. Go! Be prudent! Remember that all these women with hearts of flame are envious of Arline's supremacy over the cold and difficult Katkoff! They would soon cut their way to him, through her heart—if they could!"

"Our interests are one now, Karl," said Pulawy. "Do I not ride with my head in a halter?" He doffed his cap and darted away, a sinewy figure of dark manly grace!

Von Geist saw the silken-armored champions of Love craning their pretty necks as the bold horseman sped away down the superb avenue of trees.

In his dark-green riding tunic, with gray trousers and high hussar boots, riding with all the easy grace of the practised cavalier, Casimir Pulawy, at thirty-seven, was still a man to witch a woman's heart.

Master of fence and all manly arts, a poet and musician—an impassioned squire of dames—he was the victim of his own wild passion and of the crushing out of the fair land of Poland.

"A charming fellow," mused the iron-hearted von Geist, as the rider turned into an overshadowed forest path. "A useful fellow, too, if he were not a Polish liar and traitor; but, *va banc!* He will serve my purpose, and when that human wolf Katkoff finds out Arline's hollow faith, *Monsieur mon cousin* may dance a polonaise—at the end of a rope!"

"But he will have done his work then, and, for that matter, *la Reine des yeux tendres*, her's also! Now to dispatch this riff-raff, and to set my house in order for this blundering young cub, Max von Dornberg."

To a chorus of laughing voices and the masked bat-

teries of bright eyes, Ritter Karl von Geist only gravely replied, "Ladies, you have greatly honored the princely Governor-General!" Raising the stirrup-cup in their honor, he drank "To the Brightest Eyes on Earth!"

"When next you come to Weissenstein, you shall be my guests, *en particulier*, and each of you in turn shall reign for a day and work your own sweet wills!"

Then, when the cavalcade had disappeared, Karl von Geist sat down to plan out his enmeshing of the unsuspecting Max. It was a bit of specially fine art!

Seated in the superb room, with its massive ceiling of carved oak, where the hump-backed, love-crazed monster had once plotted his watchful cruelties to guard the lovely slave of a Czar's caprice, Serge Maximoff pondered long over the whole coming summer's operations. It was a campaign of deadly portent to his victims.

"Three days will bring Casimir and the bewitching baggage back here again, incognito! I will receive these rude Oestland nobles in the Hunting Lodge under pretence of safety from all possible spying! They will drink like olden Danes and they gamble like crazy Russians, and so I do not need woman's arts to mystify them!

"I can reach Marie von Dornberg's last heart-citadel by filling these fellows up with soap-bubble visions, iridescent, glittering, and transient! Dreams of a free Oestland—under its own autonomy, like Finland—the guarantee of all the old hereditary privileges, and the backing of the wary German Emperor—these will trap them all!

"Casimir Pulawy and Arline can soon artfully entangle Max! Her presence in the château with her cousin can be explained by my desire to fathom the governmental policy of the cruel Katkoff.

"Max von Dornberg is young and gallant enough to keep a lady's secret! I will leave Max alone by day to hunt with these titled boors, these village de Rohans! They will soon win him over to the general plan. I can later see that he commits himself!

"He shall be the Chief of the Brotherhood of the East, at Hapsal!" laughed the pitiless schemer.

"Some imprudent mummeries in the vaults of the old

Schloss will do! He will yield to it and his haughty mother will spur him on. These islanders will be made the local chiefs at Runae, at Oesel, and at Pernau, and kept away from Max. I have Gorski and that vampire woman—the Luboff—to help me to hunt Max von Dornberg down!” He filled a glass of wine and raised it to his lips.

“At the right time, I will spring the trap! Max, caught in the toils of a treason of which the others knew nothing, will be sacrificed!

“I will have them all involved, but he shall be the one caught *in flagrante*.

“Then comes his quick arrest! The offer of the government—his life, on condition of the sale of the island and the giving up of the last local sovereignty of the Baltic Provinces! His mother shall sue to me for his life. I will be the ‘friend in need,’ and when he is chased away—an exile for life—his name will be razed from the list of nobles, and the whole clan of border barons can soon be crippled.

“To marry Marie von Dornberg, to rule over Esthonia from my castle of Weissenstein! Yes; it is the prize of a campaign which will trap this defiant band of sea pirates! And I will Russianize Esthonia, and Russianize my Lady, too!

“For every sneer of the past—a sob! She shall repay! By God! It will be sweet to see her pleading for his life—to me! And Nicolas Katkoff, bound in Arline Pulawy’s toils, dare not explain to the wily Melikoff his secret visits to Weissenstein!

“He forges his own chain! I will not be here when he dallies with the golden key. And gold—gold—will bring Arline and Casimir to my secret purposes!”

He struck the table with his clenched fist till the glasses rang.

“After many years she shall repay! I never failed yet, and I shall rule here! The fox shall bring all the wolves to the hunter’s snare.”

And then, gazing at his hand, he saw a trickling stream of blood. A delicate splinter of wine-drenched glass had cut his toughened palm.

“Blood and wine!” he laughed. “Wine will flow, and blood will flow! My wine, not my blood! I can

leave the mastery of these two men to that devil-witch, Arline Pulawy! She will make a dupe of the one, and a slave of the other!"

The post-horses were being attached to Max von Dornberg's travelling carriage on a bright May morning, three days later, when Casimir Pulawy rode rapidly up the great avenue of oaks on his furtive return.

He paused with the two steaming horses in the courtyard while his lithe companion, wrapped in a light gray Austrian hussar cloak, quickly sped into a private entrance, where Serge Maximoff stood with outstretched arms. The frolicsome Venus had returned to her shadowy realm.

"You pretty masquerading witch!" he cried. "All is in readiness. I will only lead you to your rooms, for I must give Casimir his orders. But how about your dress? You cannot enchant von Dornberg in this Cupid masquerade of yours!"

The disguised woman disengaged herself from her new lover's arms. "I left all my *batterie de toilette* here, *Monsieur le Mouton*. All my boxes went back—but really empty. I think I know the way to my rooms now, and I have my golden key."

"Did Katkoff give Casimir all his papers and the police seal?" anxiously demanded the Master of Weissenstein.

"I saw to it myself, for I do not fancy Siberia," rejoined Arline, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders, as she looked up with her burning eyes.

"Then go and transform yourself into a 'man-eater,' you queen of hearts!" cried Karl von Geist. "Did you leave your maid here, as I told you?"

"Certainly, Monsieur," said the intriguante. "She very conveniently sprained her ankle!"

"Then you are free to rove over the château, from roof to the cellars. The butler has my orders. Your will is law! But not to venture out of Bluebeard's castle, is the one restriction, till I have caged my Oestland bears!"

She was gone, her thrilling voice ringing out in wild bursts of song, as her light feet pattered along the marble halls. Von Geist gazed after her in admiration.

"*Polonaise jusqu'au bout des ongles*," muttered von

Geist. "An angel's voice, a serpent smile, the form of a sylph, the eyes of a houri, the springing step of the gazelle, and—a heart of stone!

‘When in the devil’s path we tread,
Woman’s a thousand steps ahead.’

remarked the Ritter, quoting from his favorite Goethe, as he joined Casimir Pulawy in the courtyard.

The two men dispatched a hasty breakfast, while Karl von Geist gloated over Pulawy's perfect success in the obtaining of all the machinery of a Russian Chief of Police.

They had pledged each other in many a sparkling bumper, when von Geist sprang to his feet as a travel-stained courier stood breathless at the door.

"*La danse va commencer!*" dryly said the arch-conspirator, as he dismissed the man. "The nobles will be here in two hours, and, von Dornberg in three! I have had all the post-riders bribed to bring them in as I wish. Now go and prepare Arline for my visit. We three must understand each other. You are sure you know my wishes?"

"Perfectly," said Casimir.

"Then send for me when she is ready to see me," calmly said von Geist.

When the Polish adventurer had disappeared, von Geist carefully loaded a pistol and thrust it into his breast. His face hardened as he said:

"I can trust to no one now; for, after the visit of these four men, anyone might try to betray us and so bring blood upon our hands. This precious Polish pair must know just enough to let them serve me intelligibly!"

The three schemers were soon standing in Arline Pulawy's boudoir, where once the beautiful Olga Neli-doff had gazed upon the painted loves of the gods gleaming down from above on her mismated wretchedness.

The Russian secret agent's face softened as his eyes dwelt upon all the voluptuous beauty of the woman who had robed herself royally to meet Max von Dornberg and begin to mould him to his self-wrought ruin. For a new Tannhäuser was drifting into the arms of a glowing Venus, upon a modern Lurleiberg.

"Will I do, Monsieur?" tantalizingly murmured Arline, sweeping a pirouette till the air was redolent of her *violettes du forêt*.

"The Count von Dornberg alone can tell. *Finis coronat opus*."

"Before we begin our little game of hide-and-seek, let me ask you two what does the one deserve who betrays the others in our secret compact?"

"*Death!*" murmured Arline Pulawy, with a sudden shiver, while Casimir's voice, strangely hard, re-echoed "*Death!*"

"I am glad to see that there is no 'fractious minority,'" grimly remarked von Geist. "Then, being of one mind, we are all ready for *la comédie*."

And, at the warning sign of von Geist, Casimir Pulawy strode to the door. He turned when von Geist's cold voice recalled him.

"Take my horse Selim, the best in our stables. Ride down the road and meet these three nobles. Direct them to the Hunting Lodge. I will soon be there, too."

"You are then to go out and wait on the road for von Dornberg, and to bring him alone up here. Leave him to meet Arline, as if by chance," said von Geist. "He has a letter from me, and he is prepared to find you both here."

When the footfall of the departing scoundrel had died away, Arline Pulawy sprang to von Geist's side.

"Let me show you my chosen abode. If I am to rule here, as you promised, you are to obey me!" Her voice rang out, quivering with all the burden of a passion which had gathered since the briefly whispered plot on the evening of the ball.

Her fingers trembled as she drew out the golden key, and he followed her blindly, as one drunk with new wine. And so he lost his own cool head in the weaving of plots more dangerous than even he could dream.

From a window niche, an hour later, a woman breathlessly watched the Master of Weissenstein ride alone down the leafy alley to where the copper roof of the great Hunting Lodge gleamed out in the primeval forest. It had once been the abode of Count Boris and his bacchanalian crew, long before the chance glimpse of a fair face had driven him on to build a miniature Versailles here in an Esthonian forest.

Arline Pulawy's panting bosom heaved with a sigh of relief. "I must think—think!" she feverishly cried. "The one of us two who is the stronger will outlast the other! This dark Samson has power, wealth, and genius. He holds the Czar's dreadful orders to work in his mighty name! And there is no going back now.

"On, on—always! There is but one way to cope with this lion. He must be blinded—blinded! And if he should shut me up here, in this marble prison!

"Ah, no!" she laughed. "There is always *mon ours* Katkoff the irresistible. And perhaps this fair-faced boy, this brave young blue-eyed Viking, will find his way back to the Castle Perilous!"

She rang for the butler, who served her a flask of the Tokay which Emperors love to treasure in their cellars. "It is liquid love!" she laughed, as she glanced afar down the shaded avenue stretching to the west toward Hapsal.

A cloud of dust rose up afar, beyond the confines of the château's fairy gardens.

"*Voilà l'ennemi!*" she gayly laughed, as she darted away to don her chosen *robes de bataille*. "After all, I am only to steal him away from an unfledged school-girl. *C'est bien peu de chose!*"

It was an hour later when Max Count von Dornberg was ushered into the darkened state drawing-rooms by the gray old butler, his silver chain of office gleaming upon his breast.

"Madame will soon be apprised of your Lordship's coming," said the old man, with a deep bow. "And your Lordship's rooms have been assigned for you, by my master's especial direction."

Gazing in wonder at the semi-imperial state of the vast rooms where Boris Nelidoff had vainly sued to the marble-hearted woman who coldly dissembled and bided her time, Max von Dornberg started in dumb surprise as Arline Pulawy stood there in his pathway, her liquid eyes fixed upon him in seeming wonder. She was a very dream of delight.

"You here?" she murmured, and then, as the young man chivalrously knelt and kissed her hand, she shyly said: "It is the Count von Dornberg, is it not? We met, I think, at Reval, but only for a few moments."

The traveller drew his breath softly, as his pulses bounded with a sudden passionate impulse.

For he was in the splendid morn of life, when a fair woman's flute-like voice bids the rich wine of Life surge in the veins.

"There is but one woman in the world who can never be forgotten!" murmured Max von Dornberg. "The Gräfin Pulawy is the Queen of the Esthonian shore!"

The spell was wrought, and the *lion amoureux* was in the toils.

She drew him by a glance of her eyes to a seat at her side.

"It is a fairy *rencontre*," she smilingly said. "I am here incognito with my cousin to escape the raw fogs of Reval for a few days. Doctor Adelsdorfer certifies me as being ill in my closed datcha Marguerite. And so, if you are tired of your hunting forays by day, I shall claim your knightly service here in the evenings.

"You belong to me in the starlit hours, and so I now give you my orders: 'Silence and discretion.' In fact, I am not equal to meeting the bold-eyed nobles who are now gathering with Ritter von Geist in the Hunter's Lodge, and my cousin Casimir has obtained the favor that I may rule this dreamy Paradise all undisturbed!"

Her eyes roved over his splendid, stalwart manhood with an approval but scantily veiled by her fringing lashes. Max quivered under her languorous glances.

"I shall obey your slightest wishes, Madame la Comtesse," said Max, his agitated voice betraying him.

"And so, you shall soon receive your reward," she murmured. "While we wait for the arrival of the Ritter von Geist, let me be the first to show you the wonders of this fairyland. It is an enchanted castle, fit for Love's queen to rule."

And, leading him on, the coy temptress at his side lingered near him, her robes touching him, her touch upon his arm thrilling him, as, with a lingering, measured coyness, she opened to his astonished eyes for the first time the splendors of Weissenstein.

They had passed out of the great marble theatre, on to the Esplanade, where the sunset gold was already falling in dying reflections. A noble and inspiring scene lay before them in the hush of the calm evening.

Max von Dornberg was now drunken with the beauty of the scene, with the gilded splendors of the princely palace, and, a new Tannhäuser, he soon forgot the pleading girl-face which had watched him sail away over the ashen waters of the sound. For he was under the spell of this Circe whose velvet eyes "burned into his bosom's core." And Arline saw that he was her very slave in thought, even now.

"It is wonderful," he murmured; "but I have only seen you—you alone in all this splendor!" The woman who tempted stood there at his side with softly shining eyes.

"Now," she whispered, "remember! *Qui va à la chasse, perd sa place!* You owe to me your evenings, and beware lest the fauns and dryads lure you away from me.

"Ritter von Geist has business of moment with the gentlemen whom he has summoned here, and I shall be left here lonely. Casimir will do the honors at dinner. There comes the Master of Weissenstein, and so now I lose you. *Au revoir—à bientôt!*" she whispered, bringing a glow to his waiting heart.

Four days later, Max von Dornberg had a secret which was not of the long-drawn discussions in the Hunter's Lodge after the day's chase. He had promised the three nobles to come and confer privately with each at his return to the seashore.

He sat late at night in the great Cabinet de Boris, in deep converse with the wily Ritter, who had lurked upon his path for years, and now a new ambition had entered his soul at the tempting of a Judas who led him on to rule or ruin.

"You must be the star of the East, the chief of Es-thonia," said von Geist. "*Aut Cæsar, aut nullus!*"

But, on the eve of the departure of the three hoodwinked dupes who sat late with von Geist over their cups at the Lodge, Max von Dornberg had passed the portals of that secret door, where he was welcomed, in the brooding darkness, by the glowing goddess whose slender hand clutched that fatal golden key.

CHAPTER VII.

EVE AND THE SERPENT.

Count Max von Dornberg was fooled to the top of his bent by the crafty Master of Weissenstein in the seven days of the visit of the private hunting-party. In his reckless nature was a compound of the headlong Swedish pride and that latent abandon which had made Adolf von Dornberg an easy victim when the four winds of Passion, Folly, Sin, and Luxury swept through the deserted castle of Reason. "Like father, like son" is a sterling old proverb.

The romantic seclusion of the Château de Boris, the dangers and difficulties of his meetings with the Lithuanian sorceress, and the necessary hypocrisy in all his relations with Casimir Pulawy and his stern host, all disarmed any lingering suspicions. His wild ancestral nature had returned to him in the gusty salt-breezes of the Baltic, and the Russian régime of mystery and deceit was being slowly unfolded to him. Count Max was *en train*.

He wondered not at von Geist's long-drawn-out conferences with the three mighty hunters of the Oestland Isles. Fenced in their barren islands, wearing the tattered mantle of a pride as threadbare as the dignity of the Spanish Hidalgos, the three rugged Baltic nobles were soon easy victims to Karl von Geist's specious craft.

By day, the Ritter occupied a shooting-stand with one of their number, leaving the other two to influence each other's loosened natural ambitions.

In the long evenings, Karl von Geist feasted late at the Lodge with his destined victims, plying them with every luxurious vintage, and delving into their heart-secrets.

He appeared not to notice the impatience with which Max von Dornberg hied himself away long before midnight, ostensibly to meet Casimir Pulawy at the great château. The Ritter was engaged in bagging his game in leisurely fashion.

Waldeck, Solms, and von Mollwitz, already sworn

members of the Brotherhood of the East, burned now to return to the island of Worms and urge the haughty Countess von Dornberg to give to them the one leader whom they sighed for.

They only knew from von Geist that the young Count was the evening companion of Casimir Pulawy, whom they naturally distrusted as a Pole. Von Geist laughed with them as he told them how he had outwitted his official guest in making the homeless Polish noble the local Chief of Police. It had been a master stroke of deceit.

"I intend to use Casimir Pulawy as my Intendant and personal representative," confided the Master of Weissenstein. "He shall issue a score of blank passports and road permits, of which I will give some to each of you. For we will need all the means of safe communication.

"You, Waldeck and Solms, at the islands of Oesel and Runae, and you, von Mollwitz, at Pernau, can thus communicate safely with me, for the use of the Russian mail or postal telegraph might bring any of us at once to the halter. We must have a private password for each of us, and a cipher which I will give to you later.

"As I can send my men to you on these passports and permits of Pulawy, your chosen messengers can freely come and go. There is but one vital point to cover on the line—the post of honor and danger—and it is Hapsal. And I have already chosen the chief of the order there!"

"Von Dornberg!" cried all three of the dupes, in a chorus.

"Yes, the very man—after you have reported to his mother. Let her give him over to us. He is, as yet, in the dark. I have allowed him to flatter and hoodwink this starveling Pulawy.

"The fact is, Pulawy is a mere titled *chevalier d'industrie*.

"Now, von Dornberg is rich. The Pole is educating our young friend at cards, and, as the new Chief of Police has a pretty cousin over at Reval, we can soon get an easy hold on Prince Katkoff through von Dornberg. Have you ever seen the Gräfin Arline Pulawy?"

Von Geist was keenly watching their three faces.

"Never!" replied Waldeck; "but I presume, as she has her villa on the Katharinenthal, General Prince Katkoff is the squire of dames. I begin to see your wise plan!"

Von Geist smiled wickedly. "I will loan Weissenstein to Katkoff for his unofficial pleasure tours. Count Casimir, of course, will see to all the proprieties, and the easy-going Grafen Arline will bring such ladies with her from Reval as Katkoff may desire to entertain here. I shall watch over Pulawy and young von Dornberg.

"The few thousand roubles that this hungry Pole wins at cards will soon return to us, for the Grafen can hoodwink Prince Katkoff.

"Once that Max von Dornberg is within the secret ring of Prince Katkoff's pleasures, then he can protect us, with the help of the two Poles at Reval, for I intend to make our secret headquarters at Hapsal, in the old Schloss itself!"

The three Esthonians sprang to their feet in a sudden alarm. "*Impossible!*" they cried. "The police station is on the square, in front of the great entrance."

And then Karl von Geist laughed merrily. "You forget that Count de Bellegarde is von Dornberg's kinsman. I have awakened the curiosity of this unfledged boy.

"There are galleries and casemates by the score under the old walls. There the Chapter of the Brotherhood shall safely meet. The Schloss is open at all hours as a lovers' rendezvous. Remember your own youthful days!"

When the general laugh had ceased and the wine-cups were all replenished, von Geist said: "De Bellegarde still is the Lord of the Manor. His feudal rights are still inviolate. His park and the Schloss are always open to the public. He has all the keys of these old crypts and galleries, last used for ammunition storage in the Crimean war days, when the allied fleets vainly tried to storm Sveaborg. We will be absolutely safe there.

"Now, Max always visits the de Bellegardes. There will be General Dragonoff, the first Aide-de-Camp to the Czarewitch, and the Czar's special favorite, always in the family circle. He is a co-trustee of this great heiress, Barina Valdor, with young von Dornberg's mother.

"There are a half-dozen entrances to the Schloss, only used by the de Bellegarde family. Max will have all the keys of these, and of the subterranean chambers also. They shall be secretly duplicated. And so, stealing in, one by one, our local Chapter can safely meet. The safest place is sometimes the nearest to the enemy!

"That fat-witted Gorski will never look into the Manor House of Hapsal to hunt for traitors. No! Max is free as air to go and come!

"And, as de Bellegarde soon gives a magnificent fête to the Czarewitch, all the family of the Countess will be presented by the de Bellegardes and General Dragonoff.

"No! We are impregnable! Just leave me to manage this headlong youngster! But you must satisfy his suspicious mother. Tell her that you will supervise his plans and guard him.

"Let him worm his way into Katkoff's favor, for he will draw away suspicion from the little *amourette d'été* with the Polish Graf. Katkoff only fears St. Petersburg gossip. So, we will be secret masters of all Katkoff's plans. For I will supply Madame la Graf's toilettes. It will be a boon to Katkoff. I'll even let the Prince win a little money from me!

"Casimir Pulawy is my creature, and he has a true Polish heart. He only wants money and luxury. But woe to him should he ever dare to try to leave Weissenstein! The woman is the directing mind, and she is mine!" Von Geist smiled wickedly and fingered his golden key.

"You are a wonder! A magician!" chimed the enraptured nobles. "Tell us now what to do."

Von Geist laughed. "Only keep in line. I will escort you for a few miles on your way, and give you all my secrets on the road. The sooner you can see Countess von Dornberg now, the better.

"I shall send Count Max home by Reval, to disarm suspicion. In that way he will surely meet the Countess Pulawy, and also gain Katkoff's good will.

"I will follow you in a week, going by Hapsal to receive Count Max at his mother's hands. For she does not know me. But she *does* know and trust you! Remember your country!"

The three dupes were steeped in rapture at the sly plans.

Karl von Geist filled a last loving-cup. His tall form towered over them as he solemnly said: "I have given up ten years of my life to paving the way for the Brotherhood of the East! Chiefs of Chapters, you must know now that each Chapter is to be absolutely ignorant of the work of the others, and each Chief is supreme in his own district.

"It is our only safety. The only remedy for human weakness, accident, or betrayal. Not a document will be kept in existence. And only from the Grand Lodge at Presburg will the final decrees be issued.

"There, the Twelve will receive any trustworthy pilgrim whom we send to them. And so, safe on Austrian soil, in the halls of the Teutonic Knights, we can bid Poland, Lithuania, Courland, Livonia, and Esthonia to rise as one man when the times are ripe, with the Kaiser of Germany's steel walls of bayonets behind us to enforce all our natural demands. Leave Max von Dornberg now to do his share of the work.

"After I have received him at his loyal mother's hands, he shall visit you, armed with the secret orders of the Twelve, and all the passwords of the new faith. Give to me now the hand of a sworn Brotherhood to the Death!" It was the solemn pledge of their lives.

They drank deep into the night, and next day the three hoodwinked guests explored the splendors of Château de Boris. There was no trace of the Polish song-bird. "No light plume left as a token."

And when von Geist paused before the state apartments, he gravely said: "These are sacred to the memory of the beautiful Olga Nelidoff, who broke her heart here in a silent despair!" Within, the wild-eyed Arline was laughing in the embrace of her ardent lover.

When Max von Dornberg and the four Brothers of the East sat down to their splendid banquet in the great dining-hall, the velvet-eyed Polish adventuress was laughing, in her own gilded nest, over the fervent letters of that sighing lover, Prince Nicolas Katkoff.

As Casimir Pulawy read the Governor-General's passionate appeal, he gayly pledged his beautiful fellow-conspirator in the amber Cliquot.

"Arline! We will build up a new Poland here in these dreamy wilds!" he boasted. "Write your loving

letters now to Katkoff. I will send a policeman-courier over to Kegel, and the Governor-General must find you there on his return.

"For even Doctor Adelsdorfer would not dare to bar out that Russian devil! We must not fail now. He must be deceived. These Oestland fisher-barons leave this afternoon. And you must soon despatch Max von Dornberg. I hate to lose him. For I am twelve thousand roubles the winner!" And so, they plotted and wove their web of lies.

Arline Pulawy gayly fingered a rich diamond necklace which von Geist had clasped around her swan-like throat the day before. "He shall go, Casimir," she moodily sighed, "but you must bring him back to me soon!"

"Remember," ominously said Casimir, "all depends on Katkoff's favor! This golden nest, the shower of sudden wealth, and your secret state! Do not lose your head!"

"Von Geist you can trust. His cold ambition lies afar. His heart is as frozen as the Todtensee! But fear Katkoff! He must be always kept the dupe of his own vanity.

"Do not forget your part in your foolish fancy for this mere boy! There is a whey-faced Russian school-girl who is his mother's protégée.

"He will marry her! The woman whom Lazareff pursues!"

Arline Pulawy leaned back with a luxurious sigh. "And so the tiger-hearted Fedor Lazareff fancies the little heiress!" She remembered the young wolf's murmur, "*J'attendrai!*"

A sly scheme unrolled itself before the dissolute woman's dreaming eyes as she lay back on her cushions brooding over her human prey.

"To subjugate Lazareff, to nourish his passion for the golden heiress!" she mused. "There are worse ideas! Marriage only shackles fools and frees the strong-hearted! Like charity, it covers a multitude of sins! Let Max von Dornberg obey his haughty mother—this island queen! I will soon have him back, and Fedor shall console the Valdor heiress!" The Countess Arline had a sweet little will of her own.

"What new deviltry are you hatching up?" impatiently cried Casimir. "I must go and attend these departing guests. Have your letters for Katkoff all ready in an hour."

"Remember, he is to find you at Reval on his return, and he will bring you back here to queen it *à la improvisiste*. In ten days, Ritter von Geist will be away, lurking in the Island Kingdom."

"One single slip, and we are lost! Take these blank passports now. They may be means of safety later. I have already sent a dozen of them away, where I can use them later, for Russia never dishonors its police seal!"

He gave her a dozen blank passports duly authenticated with the blue double-headed eagle seal, and all regularly attested with the same number of road permits. They were guarantees against a shameful death on the gallows.

It was the rest of a brooding lioness which came upon her as Casimir Pulawy strode away. The fierce delight of moulding the puppets of the *beau monde* to be the slaves of all her wayward passions had intoxicated her. "I shall play the game out to the last card—this weird, strange, fevered drama of Russian life!" she murmured, and so she was still dreaming of her own veiled future when Max von Dornberg, with passion-laden eyes, strode to her side.

He kissed the golden key as he tossed it into her blue-veined hand.

"They are all gone!" he murmured. "You are mine for an hour—one happy hour, Arline! Perhaps the last in long months!"

The serpent-woman drew him down to her breast, and her warm white arms wound round him as she whispered: "Stay yet another day! Give to me a few hours to gather the strength to part from you!" And she easily won the heedless youth's promise.

When he left her, he had sold his own manhood to shame! For the appeal of his loving mother for an instant return with his three fellow-patriots was put aside at the mere bidding of the Circe who had stolen away his will with the caresses of those clinging, crimsoned lips, which he now kissed in all a lover's mad

ardor. And Elizabeth was forgotten, as Venus clasped Tannhäuser to her snowy breast.

The lying Delilah learned his every secret in this hour of a last abandonment. "Listen," she whispered, as her dreaming eyes met his own. "I fear this Karl von Geist! He would gladly win the heart that you alone rule! I know all his cold, devilish arts!

"Take these passports, these road permits. You can surely find some faithful messenger. In the coming days, which will be years to me—the days until you return—you must send back to me letters—words which live, words that burn with love, words to tell me if you are still my own!

"No one must know! Casimir gave me these priceless papers. Remember, we live under the sword in Russia! You may only too soon need them!

"Send me your messenger, and I will write back to you the story of my heart. For, Max, I cannot live without your love! You know what a cruel fate bars me from the splendid fêtes you go to. There is the Czarewitch's hostile court! Katkoff's mad jealousy keeps me away! And he fears his giant Imperial master, the Czar to be. The Pole is proscribed in the reeking halls of the Russian!

"Your own island home, the splendid manor of the de Bellegardes, are also closed to the daughter of Poland, too. And now my fate is in your loyal hands. You must guard my honor! A woman's secret of loving weakness! I bless the storm that drifted our barks together. Only cleave to me while yet you can—yet a few days!" And he stayed on, drunken with a passionate bliss.

That night Karl von Geist marvelled at the sullen refusal of the young islander to leave the Château de Boris. He was himself ready to steal back into the Paradise where a fond woman awaited him with the faith born of his new birth and self-consecration to a country's liberties. And yet, the Ritter dared not force Max away from the defiant Arline.

For two days Casimir Pulawy and Karl von Geist plotted over their dark dealings in the Hunter's Lodge, while Max von Dornberg left unanswered the urgent letters which vainly called him out of the labyrinth of

the velvet-eyed enchantress. There was no dissembling in von Geist's roughness as he at last sought Arline Pulawy's presence, unannounced. He must break off this loving dalliance.

"Are you mad?" he cried. "Break off this player-queen idyl, the child of a new-born folly! Katkoff will be at Reval before you unless you leave at dawn! Casimir has all my orders. And the gates of Weissenstein are forever closed to you if the Governor-General discovers your rash treachery!

"There is all the summer-time to give this young fool his crowning lesson in *la grande passion*.

"Adelsdorfer has sent a courier to warn me that Prince Katkoff leaves Hapsal, mark you, to-morrow night! And these wild sea-dogs of Esthonia may betray you to Countess Marie!"

"And you will surely bring him back to me?" pleaded the frightened woman.

"Madame la Comtesse!" sneered Karl von Geist, "you shall have the pleasure of disenchanting him, by satiety, *if you insist!*"

"It is a new proof that no Pole can be true! You are untrue to yourself—the mere slave of a woman's own flickering fancies! And now, to-night, break up your camp on the Lurleiberg! He goes with me—if I have to disenchant him!" There was a brutal menace in the tyrant's insolent threat.

"You would tell him?" Arline Pulawy cried, her eyes filled with the sudden storm-signals of a woman's deadly rage.

"The secret of the golden keys!" calmly said Karl von Geist. "Yes; anything to make you remember our compact! I think I had better send Casimir to you.

"Since when have you taken on the exclusive airs of a *rosière amoureuse*? Do not pull down your golden house of cards, my lady. It is tottering now. Trust Casimir to bring von Dornberg back. He is fleecing him at cards. You are both Poles of a pattern breed!"

Arline Pulawy's stormy tears veiled her angry eyes as von Geist stalked away. The Ritter laughed a scornful laugh, which echoed in a ghastly mockery in the lonely marble halls. "All the better," he mused. "I was a fool to lose my temper! It's a likely young dragoon

of a lover—this new toy. But Max is in the plastic state now, and easily moulded! He shall go on, and on. And his headlong folly will open the door to me to bring his chilly-hearted mother to rule at Weissenstein!

“Perhaps *la belle* Arline is even now building better than she knows! She may take him off my hands forever. And then, with Fedor Lazareff the husband of Nadine——

“No!” decided von Geist, with a last devilish sneer, “it is better to fool him to the top of his bent! When he deserts her—when this mad passion play is over—then she will gladly give him up to my vengeance. She will help me to seal his doom, and laugh at his ruin! There is a Marguerite de Nesle in the ivory-moulded, glowing form of this woman-serpent! He shall be left to make the running, and choose his own pace.” For von Geist trusted more to Nature than to art!

With a surly oath, in the gray dawn next morning, Max von Dornberg gazed up at the window where a white hand was waved in adieu for the last time.

Karl von Geist was only watching Casimir Pulawy’s travelling cortege drawing up, as the superb troika of blooded horses dashed down the arched avenue of gaunt trees.

The artful host left the gloomy young lover alone in his despair until they reached the first post-station; but he never knew that the man who rode on after them, a breathless courier, to tell that the Countess had departed for Reval, handed to the moody lover a letter whose lines seemed traced in glowing fire.

For the draught of the cup of Circe was still tingling in Max’s veins, as he remembered her passionate kisses, as he dashed on to meet three unhappy women on the pine-crested heights of the Island Kingdom.

There was a home now divided against itself by gray clouds of care at the brave old stronghold of the von Dornbergs. For each of the three women there had guarded the secret forebodings of ill which burdened their lonely hearts.

The coming of Max had broken forever the passive inertia of their loneliness, and Karl von Geist was the disturber whose influence now made Marie von Dornberg and Princess Zenaide secret and distrustful watch-

ers of each other. Peace had unfolded her white wings and sadly fled away.

It was only a dull heartache at the chilling neglect of Count Max which led the gentle-hearted Nadine to resume her lonely walks on the pine-clad crags.

When the "Aslauga," beating homeward in the teeth of a storm, brought the three Oestland nobles to share Countess Marie's vigils, the two younger women were left blankly gazing into each other's unhappy eyes when the mail-bag was opened. "Where was Max?"

There was not a line, not even a word from Arline Pulawy's love-blinded thrall, and even Marie von Dornberg's face was clouded, for her son was silent, even to her. It was the presage of some coming sorrow, the dark cloud of coming trouble.

And the fête of the de Bellegardes was to be given to present the new head of the Baltic noblesse to the future Czar. The three women were left helpless on the lonely island, with not even a single word of cheer.

"Max is not ill?" gloomily questioned the Lady of the Isles.

"On the contrary," bluntly said Baron Waldeck, "he is in glowing spirits."

Thus the shadows of dissatisfaction and distrust crept over the faces of the little circle of hearts who had only true love to offer to the man who sought now but for fools' gold. And they all fell into the ranks of the woman sacrifice.

The "Aslauga" now lay with her loosened sails in the little bay, all ready to transport the Oestland nobles across the narrow sound to Dago when the final conference of the Lady of the Isles with the Chapter Chiefs should be over.

And, heavy-hearted, Marie von Dornberg listened to the enthusiastic patriots, while the younger women ruefully conned the appealing letters of Alixe de Bellegarde.

Hapsal had suddenly blossomed out as a Vanity Fair, and the Esplanade was crowded now with the gay summer court of the Czarewitch.

The gathering of the Border nobles for Count de Bellegarde's fête was well under way, while the Russian party at the Cercle de Noblesse made the long summer

days one revel under the feverish leadership of Prince Fedor Lazareff.

The woods of Parallup rang out with the shouts of merry-makers, riding parties clattered down the forest aisles, the painted fleet of summer boats glittered on the blue waters of the bay, and all the brilliant officers of the Cavalry Guard and the Paul Regiment reported on special duty at the morning band practice, the four o'clock concert, the evening balls, and the moonlight garrisoning of the old Schloss with Fashion's gay army. The season was "on" in all its splendor.

The Princess Zenaide found Nadine Valdor alone in her room, sobbing as if her heart would break, when the grave-faced Lady of the Isles had escorted her anxious guests down to the landing.

All the long day there had been a secret session, the door guarded by faithful old Elia, who had attended the young master's advent into the world.

The four revolutionists well knew that their lives were in jeopardy while weighing in the balance the dangers of braving the Russian Bear.

In vain had Olga Luboff tried to creep in upon the secret of the grave conference. The wrinkled face of old Elia at the closed door was an ominous signal of "No thoroughfare!"

Since receiving the secret commission of Karl von Geist the Russian woman spy had plied all her softest arts upon stout Alexei Patkul, the Intendant, and the gray old butler, who had grown rich in the service of the von Dornbergs.

But an active enemy suddenly appeared upon the scene.

Patkul was the willing slave of comely Tatiana Pashkof, and the silver-haired majordomo, too, was smitten with the country girl's fresh beauty.

"If I could only get the letter-bag from Patkul or Elia," sighed the future General's wife. "A duplicate key would soon make me mistress of all their secrets! Ivan Gorski must have impressions taken of the lock and then send me a key!" She hastened to write to him.

The Judas in petticoats knew not that all these arts of the secret service were already worked by the Chief

of Police, and while she stood at the window, glowering upon the yacht sailing away, Marie von Dornberg returned with a dozen blank passports and road permits hidden in her bosom. Karl von Geist had well baited the hook for each of his dupes! She was now convinced of the Ritter's good faith.

"Send not a word, by any mail carrier!" was Baron Waldeck's last injunction. "Only by your messenger, furnished with one of our own passports! When Max is Chief of the Hapsal Chapter, we will then use the old Schloss as the central station for all our border operations. And he will have the highest cipher! And a trusty squad of the Brothers will be soon assigned to aid him here on the island."

The last lingering doubt of Karl von Geist's utter loyalty had been swept away as the Lady of the Isles, with a throbbing brow, revolved all the disclosures of three of the oldest nobles of the Oestland. She waited in vain for the appearance of her beautiful charges. All was a game of cross purposes now.

In Nadine Valdor's boudoir, the brave-hearted Circassian leaned down with an infinite pity over the poor girl who had already made the absent Max the Prince Charming of her lonely dreams. All Nadine's girlish pride had been swept away, and the fair head lay low, in the first great wretchedness of her life. Zenaide knelt beside the unhappy woman, her loveless heart touched in pity.

"You have yielded up your heart too soon, little one," she murmured. "It is for the man to sue, you are to wear your armor of pride. And, be assured, Max has not abandoned us! Remember, he is young, and foolish, too!"

As she spoke, from their overhanging window they beheld a little fisher-boat skimming along into the roughened waters of the bay, its lateen sail dipping in the curling gray brine as it drove along. "Look, a boat from Hapsal!" And there were now two bright, eager faces waiting at the strand, as the rude fisherman demanded to be led into the presence of the Countess.

The hawk-eyed Zenaide failed not to notice that two letters were delivered to Countess Marie, one of them bearing the seal of the Ritter von Geist; but Nadine's

joyous cry as she received a letter from the absent Prince Charming made Zenaide miss the eagerness with which Olga Luboff led away the messenger to be entertained. For Gorski had sent a mail also!

The mariner stopped at the door fumbling his sailor-cap in his hand. "Any commands, my Lady? We sail in an hour!" The fisherman's horny hand had been crammed with paper roubles.

"Yes, I wish to send my butler over to Hapsal with you!"

"We leave for Hapsal on the morning tide!" cried the happy Countess. "Max writes me that our messenger was delayed a day by an accident, and that he also missed the boat on his return. They are all awaiting us at Hapsal now!" And so the mystery was solved at last. Truth is blind, and they all believed!

Princess Zenaide watched the rose's blush stealing back to Nadine Valdor's cheeks, and then forgot her own letter in studying the return of the light to the tender eyes dreaming over the pages traced by the man who had fallen under the spell of another. It was the old story—the maidenly self-surrender at the first touch of love.

It was Olga Luboff who sped the returning fisherman on his way, while old Elia carefully treasured the triple answers to Count Max's conscience-stricken missives.

While the aged butler hobbled down the rocks after them, the agile young Russian slipped a ten-rouble note in the sailor's hand. "This letter must be delivered at once to Colonel Gorski! How did you come to be sent over here?" The fisherman grinned.

"The Ritter von Geist and the young Count wanted a boatman, and the police sergeant at the landing gave me the detail, and Colonel Gorski gave me my secret orders. If you ever need me, remember Ivan the boatman! I am the Colonel's own man! Trust to me!"

The swinging masthead lights of the "Aslauga" gleamed out over the dark, tossing waters of the bay that night on the yacht's return from landing the dangerous visitors, before Marie von Dornberg had decided the question of her son's fate.

The stately woman was true to herself, even in hiding a secret of the old days from her son. She gazed at her

own beautiful reflection in the glass, now an accusing monitor. "I am led by Karl von Geist alone in this, not by my son's wishes," she truthfully acknowledged. It was a fearful responsibility, and she hesitated.

The brief words of the arch dissimulator had thrown her upon her own unaided judgment. The verdict was in her hands alone now.

And how skilfully he had worded his last appeal!

"I have gone too far forward to recoil, and those who have been with you are the fellow-sharers of my secret. I came to Hapsal to open my social campaign and to make a fair-weather friendship with both the parties! General Prince Katkoff, who has been my official guest, will present me to the Czarewitch!

"The Count de Bellegarde has also bidden me to his *fête de noblesse*! I shall initiate the first circle of the Hapsal Chapter before I return to Weissenstein.

"Our secret headquarters will be in the Schloss. For I owe my life to my country, to my order, to the cause!

"You will have decided before I see you. If you give Max to us to be our leader here, at the post of honor, I shall know it by your eyes when we meet.

"If you recoil, then the Oestland must be saved without him.

"Why should I come back with him, unless we are one in heart for the holy cause? You cannot share our secret councils. But it is for you alone to say if he shall! I will come back to your enchanted island!

"If you decide to stand aloof, then the flag of the three crowns and falcon must be absent from our secret league. You hold my life in your hand, in the letters! I can trust my life to your honor! The messenger is safe!"

And then, with a strange feeling of a new purpose in her life, Marie von Dornberg recalled the words which she had impulsively pencilled, and which were even now being borne far over the channel on the flitting fisher-boat.

It was to the man, and not to the revolutionist, that the woman, whose heart had long lain dormant, wrote the fateful words, "Come! I have forgotten the past!"

For, she foolishly believed in his soul regeneration. His mad pursuit she viewed now in softened colors.

The night's clouds hid Hapsal's lonely shores, the feet of the merry dancers had paused for rest, and the lonely trees of the Stille Promenade knew no lingering lovers beneath their "faithful branches," when Karl von Geist, in a drenching storm, watched the fisher-boat driving across the shallows with a red light at its swaying mast. His heart was tugging at its strings in a mad unrest.

In the little police station on the quay he tore open the note which the sleepy mariner handed him. By the yellow, blinking candle he read its message, and then a frantic gleam of joy convulsed his pale face.

"By God! She comes to me, of her own accord, with open arms!" he murmured. "It is a double happiness to snare her and her son with the same lure! It was a stroke of genius to flatter her with reclaiming a lost soul and saving her country at the same time!

"And so each of them has a little secret to hide. I see my way clear to extinguish the Island Kingdom, and make these thick-headed fools forfeit all their Hanseatic privileges!

"And I will let them run their own Chapters. The blow shall fall from an unseen hand!"

It was in the gray of the morning that old Elia awoke his young master, who had chivalrously shared Ritter von Geist's apartments at the Hôtel Petersbourg. The face of Count von Dornberg was haggard with a still unsatisfied passion.

It was the voice of the Polish Delilah which had haunted his restless dreams, and he sought, against all prudence, for means of return to Weissenstein.

The devilish ingenuity of Arline Pulawy aided the wild scheming of the infatuated man. Unable to outwit the keen-eyed von Geist, she had mastered Casimir Pulawy's feeble mind in her lonely ride to Kegel.

"You wish to play cards with him! He has fabulous wealth! You and I can surely understand each other. While von Geist visits the island, let Count Max return here secretly to the Hunter's Lodge.

"You can play with him, and so gain a hoard of gold, while I watch over Nicolas Katkoff, and when I steal down to the Lodge, you can hold the Prince and his suite chained to the banquet table.

"Send this letter to Max, by a safe courier, and he will find the way to come to us!

"Now, not one remonstrance! It is my will, and if I seek a quarrel with the Governor-General, both you and von Geist are ruined in your secret schemes. I am to reign here. No other will but mine shall rule!"

It was the burning appeal of von Geist's fancied dupe that caused the headlong Max to linger at Hapsal.

Half an hour after old Elia's arrival, the aged servitor was whirled away on a special relay post to Weissenstein, with a sealed letter addressed to Count Casimir Pulawy. The siren had called him back.

"Remember," cried the young master, frowning, "this is a secret trip, to pay a debt of honor, and you are to return forthwith. Let your lips be dumb to your death! You will find our whole family at the de Belle-gardes." And so, old Elia swore on the cross to be true!

When the "Aslauga" arrived at sundown at the Hapsal quay, Count Max von Dornberg and the Ritter von Geist were the first to lead the ladies ashore, to where the silver-haired Lord of Hapsal awaited his guests with the family carriages.

Karl von Geist's steady eyes were gravely fixed upon the face of the Lady of the Isles as she fondly greeted her son.

And then, frankly extending her hand, she welcomed into her life the implacable foe of the Border aristocracy whom she had headed so long.

There was a brief parley, and the Count de Bellegarde approached the watchful schemer.

"We have only a *diner de famille* this evening," the old noble said; "but, you will meet the Dragonoffs and see our old manor house. Will you honor us?" Then the Devil himself inwardly laughed for joy.

Max had already sprung into the second carriage with Princess Zenaide and the agitated Nadine! Von Geist hesitated until a glance from Countess von Dornberg's eyes bade him accept. The silent message thrilled his heart, for it voiced the words of her laconic note: "Come, I have forgotten the past!"

And so, the stately Master of Weissenstein gravely bowed his acceptance.

"She has burned her ships behind her! There is

but one entrée needed—the crypts of the old castle! I must work for that last victory. The game is then in my hands!”

He allowed the cortege of carriages to clear the long quay, and then drove slowly to the rear entrance of the gardens of the Hôtel Salon. A single word to the nearest servant, and he was ushered into the private rooms of Colonel Ivan Gorski.

In half an hour he emerged, smiling, with the knowledge that the future husband of Olga Luboff was ready to second his plans.

“This fellow must not know too much! The companion shall blind him, at the right time, with the glances of her bold Tartar eyes. And now to dress for my star part, *l’ami de famille*.” The noble Ritter was in an exceeding good humor, and patted himself on the back.

The magnificent old manor house of Hapsal never rang to a merrier chorus than the shouts of joy closing the banquet of twenty covers, which had signalized the reunion of the Dragonoffs and the twin families of Hapsal and Worms.

General Dragonoff and Count de Bellegarde had found a host of common friends in Ritter von Geist’s cosmopolitan circle, and, wary fencer that he was, the Master of Weissenstein glided around every awkward turning-point. At the foot of the table, Max von Dornberg easily charmed the roses back to Nadine Valdor’s pale cheeks.

From the open windows the crumbling walls of the old castle were seen, lit up with the gala fire of an evening fête, and the roll of carriages in Hapsal’s stony streets was wafted to their ears, softened by the exquisite music of the orchestra stationed in the old tilting-ring of the Knights, within the walls.

Max von Dornberg furtively watched his mother as she accepted General Dragonoff’s proffer of a private audience for her family with the Czarewitch, to precede the ball at which the Oestland nobles would loyally greet their future Czar in the enchanting domains of Hapsal manor house.

“And then I shall claim you all for a visit to Dornberg,” pleaded Countess Marie. “We will sail for the misty Island Kingdom the day after the ball.”

With a hungry heart, Max von Dornberg counted up his secret courier's road route. "He will be back here on the night of the ball. Von Geist and the Dragonoffs can make up the home party. They will occupy the attention of the ladies, and so I can steal away—if she only bids me come!"

He feared lest his secret plans might shine out upon his tell-tale face, and so, when the merry party broke up, he was glad to linger over the grand Erard while the young patricians sang to Princess Zenaide's wild Tzigane music.

There was one who waited for the signal which brought the blood bounding to his quickened heart.

It was Karl von Geist, whose masterly patience had brought Marie von Dornberg out of her last refuge of safety—the stern reserve of an injured woman.

He followed her secret signal until they stood on the lawn in the strange, weird light of the second daylight, the lingering charm of the lengthened hours—love's happy surplus, stolen from envious night.

"Let me show you the gardens," whispered Countess Marie, as she led him down a leafy path.

Far away from the great manor house, with its rising tide of Russian merriment, they strayed in silence to where a flashing stream of water poured from the vase held by a marble Venus, surrounded by carven doves, who had perched upon her snowy loveliness. It was a dreamy, leafy loneliness.

And then, looking down into the shimmering waters of the basin, where the water-lilies floated, the Lady of the Isles broke the brooding silence.

"I have read your letter. I have conferred with your comrades, the friends of my lonely life. I am ready to answer you, if you come to Dornberg. But here it is dangerous. We cannot be alone!

"Even the walls have ears; the merest servant may be a dangerous spy! We are in Russia here; but there, in my Island Kingdom, I can tell you all. Will you come?"

Her bosom heaved with an agitation which she could not repress.

"It is for you to decide—you alone, Marie!" earnestly answered her wily tempter. "The vows which

Max takes upon himself cannot be lightly broken. He must never know of our past acquaintance! Have you thought of that?"

Her eyes were downcast as she murmured: "I have thought of all. We must keep each other's secrets; and if I forget the past, need you ask me if I forgive? It shall be so! At Dornberg, I can find ways to meet you alone. Only to us the past must be a sealed book, *never to be reopened!*" And then Karl von Geist gravely said:

"You must speak to Max here, to-morrow, before the ball. All of our choicest comrades will be here, and there is a freedom from restraint now at Hapsal which gives to us the golden opportunity. I can call a secret meeting of the Brotherhood and initiate your son. There is but one safe place. Here, on the night of the ball!"

"But where can the Chapter meet in safety?" whispered the terrified woman. "Here, with two regiments of troops, with a cloud of police, and two companies of rural gendarmes on the watch?" The mother's heart throbbed in a wild agony of fear.

"Through you—*you alone*—can we meet in safety!" replied her serpent counsellor. "Listen! On pretext of visiting the casemates of the old Schloss, you can get me the keys of the wickets and the keys of the crypts from the hospitable Countess de Bellegarde. I will call the Chiefs of Chapters together.

"Max shall be initiated, and then he shall be at once chosen as Chief of Hapsal Chapter. His rank, his kinship with the de Bellegardes, his first curiosity of a returned collegian, will explain all his movements.

"And then, at Dornberg, you shall know our gravest plans, through him, and I shall have your secret counsels, though you may not be sworn of our order.

"But, through life to death, you must keep my secret! Max must never know of our secret commune! For his own sake, for the sake of the past and the future of the Oestland!" Von Geist's sturdy frame trembled with emotion.

"You shall have the keys," murmured the Countess; "but, on your honor as a man, swear that the de Bellegardes shall never be drawn into trouble!"

"I swear it, Marie!" protested the Master of Weissenstein. "We intend to use the old crypts as our central agency, and de Bellegarde, of all men, must be kept in ignorance. His age places him beyond any usefulness in our order, and we only need the invincible retreat which he controls."

"Trust to me!" sighed Countess von Dornberg. She turned, and, seizing his hands, gazed long and earnestly into his eyes. "You asked me once for my love—you asked for myself! I give to my country, through you, what is dearer than my life, nearer than this poor mortal frame, to my heart's core—*my son!*"

He knelt down before her and kissed her icy hands. "We must return at once. Listen! Call Max to you to-morrow, and tell him all. I shall be silent. But, if you wish, I will await him at my hotel. Let him dine with me to-morrow."

"I shall then be presented by Prince Fedor Lazareff to the Grand Duke, and then, after the ball, I will avoid this dangerous haunt of love and summer intrigue."

"Prince Katkoff's official friendship, this court presentation, and my new dignity as a manorial proprietor, will at first screen me from all intrusion. Behind the walls of Weissenstein, I shall always be guarded only by brethren of the Order. I shall avoid Hapsal."

"But, you will not avoid Dornberg?" cried the anxious woman, into whose reawakened soul the fever of conspiracy had been so artfully introduced.

"I will come at your summons. Nothing shall stop me, save that Max should discover the story of our past. That would make us strangers *forever!*" resolutely replied von Geist, leading her away toward the château. "He would believe neither of us!"

"It is locked in our hearts!" murmured Marie von Dornberg, as her arm thrilled the tempter's very being with its meaning pressure. "The keys of the Schloss shall be yours, as you wish!"

The day before the ball at Château de Bellegarde was an agonizing suspense to three of the guests of the old Lord of the Manor. A feverish unrest now burned in Marie von Dornberg's fiery heart.

Never again would such an assembly of the Border noblesse grace the old stronghold, for the Grand Duke's

summer court had blossomed out into a splendid series of public entertainments.

The local pride of the Oestland noblesse vied with the reckless hospitality of the Russian nobles. The proud Muscovites, whose families often ruined themselves in the festivals of a Moscow coronation, were jealous to outshine their local rivals.

A preliminary reception at the de Bellegardes of the visiting patricians gave an opportunity to Biren de Bellegarde to arrange the family order of presentation, and, in a friendly band, three hundred members of the proudest Baltic families were marshalled in the great drawing-room.

For each of the leading nobles, Marie von Dornberg had a smile, a whispered word, a meaning pressure of the hand. She was at heart a conspirator already!

And an electric spark seemed to have leaped from soul to soul, kindling once more the ardor of the olden days.

The Lady of the Isles was astounded to see how rapid had been von Geist's secret propaganda, for the visitors all thronged around Max von Dornberg, hailing him as the young leader of their princely clans. The invisible crown of secret power cast its dangerous halo about the devoted Head of the Order.

Max von Dornberg was now full of his princely mother's disclosures, and he eagerly entered into the plan of a united opposition to Russian aggression.

With the adroit Master of Weissenstein as secret counsellor, the headlong youth saw himself destined to soon sweep on to be the Governor-General of a United Oestland, with its protected autonomy, the peer of independent Finland! Why not a Grand Duchy of Oestland, and the Czar ruling only in virtue of that title, for Peter's heir was sworn to sustain the Tête-Noires? It was romantically possible, and seemed even probable.

"You will learn all from von Geist," proudly declared the hoodwinked Island Queen. "He unites the Knights of Malta and the Porte Glaives with the Teutonic Knights in his mystic sway. And before we sail for Worms he will bring his secret comrades together here to initiate you, and to hail you as their chief!"

"Where?" questioned the astonished Max.

"You will learn that from me," the Lady of the Isles said. "Leave all to me. It is to be the crowning of my life's work!

"On the night of the ball, while the Czarewitch is under this roof, I will give you the signal, for there is always the Russian police to outwit!" The astounded young Count gazed vacantly at her.

And then Marie fled away to obtain the keys of the crypts for her regenerated suitor, once her too eager lover, now, in secret, her dearest foe.

She was being rapidly hurried on by the rush of her awakened patriotism, and her strong nature rejoiced in the sweep of the current which was bearing along the whole aroused noblesse of the Oestland.

The de Bellegarde mansion was thronged with the "flowers of the forest" when Marie von Dornberg stole away into the deep shades of the park, to find von Geist carefully disguised, wrapped in a loose Austrian cloak, and awaiting her at the ruined fountain by the murmuring waters.

"I have brought you all the keys!" she breathlessly cried. "Max knows all now, and I will send him to you to-morrow for your private instruction."

The sly schemer's heart leaped up in one wild throb. "She is mine!"

"Good!" he gravely answered. "You have crowned my life with its victory in this. I will take Max out on the bay to-morrow morning, alone, in a boat.

"There we can safely talk over matters which hold the fate of three hundred Oestland nobles in the sternly locked secrets of our Brotherhood.

"You, our angel of the new dispensation, must bring your young beauties to the Dagmar's side. Be a Queen of Night, and fascinate Dragonoff and his brother aides! De Bellegarde will give Count Max a first presentation to the Czarewitch as the chief of the only house on the Baltic still holding under the old tenure.

"Leave the secret work to me! To you it is given to outshine all the women who will bend their eyes upon the giant Grand Duke! And Count Max shall be the King of the Frontier Land!"

"Serge Maximoff!" solemnly cried the Lady of the Isles. "I have trusted you against all the rules that

fence around the petty womanhood of the salon. Our lives are both sworn to the great Cause, and may God deal with you even as you deal with me and mine!

"Even General Dragonoff has hinted at a brilliant governmental position which will be tendered to Max.

"If he dons the golden-broidered court costume, he, the descendant of warrior kings, sinks into the mere tchinovik. And he may not lightly refuse the Grand Duke's favor. He would fall under instant suspicion."

"Delay it!" gravely urged the crafty von Geist. "Take General Dragonoff away over to your island. Tell him that you have been deprived of your son for twelve long years. Urge him to delay the tender of office until Count Max has learned the Russian social system and made friendship with the Border nobles.

"Say that you want him for a year to yourself; you can hint that your son will soon drift into a marriage with the little Baroness Valdor."

The Lady of the Isles started in surprise. She had overlooked the idyl so strangely interrupted by Arline Pulawy's sudden infatuation.

"This will make General Dragonoff your confidant, for you must beg him to obtain a brilliant place later at court for Count Max, where Nadine Valdor can shine under the protection of Excellence Dragonoff.

"Remember, the Grand Duke may be the Czar in a year. There have been already a dozen attempts upon the old Czar's life. The Dolgorouki affair is his death warrant. You could easily get a foreign mission after the marriage for Count Max.

"Sweden would be a splendid foreign station, and he could protect our Oestland nobles. Delay the present offer! It is our only safety!"

"I will obey you!" murmured Marie; "but I must leave you. Once safely back at Dornberg we will soon bring Dragonoff over to our side, and so save Max from all our local enemies. There is Lazareff!" The mocking face of the young *roué* rose up to alarm her.

"Trust to me! He shall never harm him!" was von Geist's pledge, as he kissed Marie von Dornberg's hand.

"Max is safe in my charge!" And their hands trembled in a silent, passionate parting. The woman was not wholly conquered in Marie's ambitious nature.

The Master of Weissenstein stood watching the Juno form of the retreating Countess until she was out of sight, and then, with swift strides, he plunged along through the forest until he reached the outer park walls.

He leaped these, and by a circuitous route entered the Hôtel Salon garden! Stealing into the great hostelry, with its labyrinth of passages around the theatre and ball-room, he entered Colonel Gorski's rooms.

The burly Colonel sprang up alarmed at von Geist's entrance. "There they are at last!" cried his visitor, as the keys crashed down on the table. "Make plaster moulds of them all at once, and give me a set of the moulds. Our harvest will soon be ripe for the sickle. I will come here for them as soon as the ball is in progress.

"And who will mark down our quarry? You must know each one. I will tell you of the assembly."

"The only one whom I dare trust!" laughingly said the Colonel, as he picked up a silken scarf and pointed to the doors of his private salon.

"She will haunt the Schloss garden and gain admittance to the old winding stairway. Disguised as a peasant girl keeping a tryst, no one can know her, for, of course, she is not bidden to the de Bellegardes' ball, and her fine hand will work for me."

Ritter von Geist whispered a few words and strode away to his own hotel.

While the tryst was kept at the fountain, old Elia, travel-stained and weary, stood before the young Count von Dornberg in his rooms at the Château de Bellegarde. He handed a letter to his master, and paused for further questioning.

The halls below them were all filled with merry-makers, and Max von Dornberg never knew how swiftly Princess Zenaide had glided to her own room, where her quick eyes had noted old Elia stealing back with his report.

At a recessed door, joining the old apartment, the Circassian could hear the eager young noble's questioning. "You saw the lady?"

"Yes, Barin; and she showed me the Hunter's Lodge and told me to tell you that her own man would meet you at the nearest post station and lead you to her there

by a wood path. You are not to go to the Marble Château, for there is danger and positive discovery there! It is full of Prince Katkoff's spies!" Old Elia had fathomed the secret of Max's fiery passion.

When the old man had humbly kissed his young master's hand and slyly pocketed a fifty-rouble note, Max von Dornberg strode down the great stairway to join the revellers. Before the aged butler left the room he was confronted by the bold Circassian beauty.

One wave of her hand commanded his silence. When she had led him into her own boudoir she resolutely locked the door.

"*I overheard all!*" she threateningly said. "Tell me the whole story of this hidden beauty, or I will have the Countess turn you adrift to starve! I will not harm Count Max. He is like all young men—vain and foolish! But the Barina Valdor shall not bear a broken heart in her loving bosom!"

The frightened old peasant, once a serf, fell on his knees and told a story which brought tears of rage to the Princess Zenaide's eyes.

All the next night, during the magnificent fête, where the Czarewitch and his lovely consort were surrounded with a fairyland of Biren de Bellegarde's creation, Princess Zenaide watched the artful manoeuvres of Count Max. She noted his distraught air, and the long absence of two hours, while, strangely, a dozen of the greatest Border nobles, too, were missing! The music of the Grand Duke's ball echoed in the gloomy galleries where Max von Dornberg received the secret passwords of his new Brotherhood.

There was a haughty scorn of the Countess Marie's duplicity, too, in the young Circassian's heart as she noted Karl von Geist stealing to the side of the woman who had long been the boast of the Oestland for womanly worth! Was there a fallen idol? Zenaide dared not ask herself.

The young Chief of the new Chapter of Hapsal was now hidden under the trees in the Schloss garden, conferring with his new comrades, while the Master of Weissenstein leaned over Countess Marie in her chosen bower in the great ball-room.

"Is there no truth in this lying world of shams?"

angrily mused Zenaide. "This is her own work! She has set von Geist on to lure her son away to Weissenstein, where this Polish snake awaits the young fool!"

"And all this only to have her old lover at her side, there, in the lonely island, with no one but the purblind old General and his doting wife to outwit!" The hasty judgment of an honest, outraged heart!

The indignant, free-souled young captive burned to share her knowledge with Nadine Valdor. "Alas!" she sighed. "I cannot disgrace her guardian in that timid girl's eyes. For Max—headlong and stubborn fool!—will break her heart soon enough. It is woman's lot to love—to love and suffer!"

But, with a sternly practical resolve to trace out the hidden intrigue, Zenaide was the first to wander in the fragrant gardens of Bellegarde Park. She was communing with her own restless, rebellious heart. The very air seemed freighted with deceit and passion's miasma.

In all the splendid pageant of the ball, she only remembered that she was the captive daughter of murdered kings when she bowed to the giant Czarewitch, a towering Colossus, standing there in the full uniform of a Russian Field Marshal.

When she kissed the slender hand of the dark-eyed daughter of the Sea Kings, Zenaide, lonely and motherless, was touched at the gentle graciousness of the Dagmar's wistful, brooding eyes.

"You must come to the Court, Princess Zenaide! Remember, General Dragonoff is one of our noblest subjects, and your future shall be the Grand Duke's especial care." The wistful eyes thrilled her with an infinite pity.

A lonely stranger in an alien land, dependent upon the bounty of the victor, Princess Zenaide forgot all the witchery of the magnificent fête in her own sorrows as she listened to the thrilling song of the lark by the lake. She was the first to greet the morn.

"I must watch over and guard poor Nadine!" sighed Zenaide. "There is this heartless brute Lazareff. He followed her with his gloating eyes last night in the dance.

"And Max, drunk with a cup of Circe, leaves his

sweet foster-sister to be the prey of sly insult, while the Countess von Dornberg lives over her old amours with this sleek devil von Geist! Ah, the stars were right!"

She lifted her eyes, and Max von Dornberg, with a troubled brow, stood before her. There had been deep drinking after the last mazurka, and high play after the Russian National Hymn had announced the departure of the Imperial couple, under the escort of a squadron of dragoons.

"Princess Zenaide," the young noble moodily said, "I am called away to Leal to arrange some affairs with my brother noblesse of the Tête-Noires.

"Cheer up Nadine and make her happy. I will be home within a week. I shall take a sailboat direct from Leal to the island. I depend on you!" But, Aida was defiantly mute.

To his astonishment, the tall daughter of the Adighé passed him without a word and fled away, a swift Camilla, to the house.

But, when the "Aslauga" beat out of the harbor, and General Dragonoff and von Geist were leaning over the seemingly contented Countess, Princess Zenaide grimly smiled to think that a private messenger of her own was galloping after the stormy-hearted Max, speeding back to his enslavement.

Three days later, Zenaide read over her letters and watched von Geist and the Countess wandering in the gardens at Dornberg. "This is a world of lies!" she cried. "*Max is back at Weissenstein!*"

CHAPTER VIII.

SPREADING THE NET.

There came at last a balm and solace to Princess Zenaide's outraged heart which caused the true-hearted child of Nature to forget Countess von Dornberg seemingly plotting the dishonor of her house, as the Circasian fancied, in those long colloquies with the Master of Weissenstein.

The household at Dornberg was now divided into two groups. On the great terrace, with its sunny glimpses of the romantic shore-line and reaches of the sapphire sea, or under the blossomed trees of the old orchard, where the bees hummed merrily, the two young beauties gathered around the silver-haired Excellence Dragonoff, her motherly face wreathed in smiles, while her delicate fingers were busied with some intricate lace-making.

Stern old General Dragonoff, his jewelled Saint George gleaming out in crimson on his long, gray surt-out, with its broad, flat shoulder-knots, was the typical old soldier *en retraite*. And these two were both open, pure, and kindly souls.

The veteran's blue eyes beamed lovingly on the two dissimilar young patricians, always his eager audience, while he methodically manufactured his cigarettes from a *tabatière*, bearing the monogram in diamonds of a grateful Czar. While his turquoise-gemmed fingers trifled with the papyrus, he bewitched the romantic girls with an old soldier's stories.

They listened to his tales of the wild Ukraine; his stories of night battles with the mad Turcomans; his memories of the awful siege of Sebastopol, and the brighter glimpses of a young soldier's memories when he had ridden out beyond the Russian lines to look up into some bewitching Circassian girl's face, as she leaned out from her low casement—a sweet face amid the perfumed almond blossoms, to smile down on a foeman risking his life for a single flash of her dark eyes. And the beautiful eyes gazing on him were often veiled with sudden tears.

The very spirit of chivalry lived in Dragonoff's recitals of Melikoff's frantic assaults on Kars; of the White General, Skobeleff, the darling of the heroic fight at Lovtcha; of the dismal struggle of Shipka Pass, far above the fleecy, drifting Balkan clouds; and of the frozen ranks of the silent dead in the Balkan defiles!

The story of the great assault at Plevna, where the iron-hearted Guardsmen closed up and sang their regimental songs in the death-hail; the ringing recital of General Valdor's heroic charge into the Turcoman camp at Geok Tepé, and the history of how the lion-hearted Dimitri Dragonoff had given up his gallant soul as a forfeit to save the life of a helpless child.

And stories of the brilliant court in the Winter Palace, with all the wild romance of the touching, heartless, bewildering palace-life, where there is always a prophecy of murder in the music-breathing air, and hearts are broken to the tender throbbing of the quivering melodies of the waltz. Weird, fantastic, fascinating life in Russia is one long drama.

Nadine Valdor's gentle eyes were cloudy as she listened to the story of how General Valdor had never looked again upon his island home of Arensburg, after Marie von Ehrenstein had given her girlish heart to the great Count von Dornberg. The father who died under the flashing Turcoman sabres had given his child back as a legacy to the woman whom he loved to his latest breath! A tireless, unforgetting love can haunt a great man's breast.

But Zenaide — "Aida, the Tcherkess" — felt her heart burn within her as she thought of Marie von Dornberg's treachery to that noble dead lover—to her wilful self-surrender to the wiles of the deep Master of Weissenstein. Was it even possible? She dared not think!

"I cannot bear it!" she murmured. "I will beg him to take me away—anywhere, even to the mad whirl of the court—for I will not see Nadine's heart broken by inches!"

And yet she hesitated, though the Dragonoffs were charged to delicately urge the invitation of the compassionate Imperial pair, who pitied the young Circassian's helpless state, fretting vainly, an innocent victim in her broken pride.

The language of her childhood, the scenes of Schamyl's dominions, and the memories of Daghestan brought back by the old soldier's recitals, softened the indomitable heart of the captive.

In the long evening, after the day's excursions were done, General Dragonoff and the sly von Geist often sat together in the library, keenly fencing over affairs of state, or recalling the mighty minds which they had known in their world-wandering.

The Countess had not failed to notice Princess Zenaide's strangely chilled demeanor. Her heart had been always opened to the friendless girl, and now, more than the listlessness of her daily greetings, she *noted* the sullen hostility of her eyes.

"I should not have taken her to the de Bellegarde fête," mused the Lady of the Isles. "It recalls the triumph of Russia over her dead kinsmen." And yet, with a woman's self-protective caution, Marie von Dornberg withdrew herself behind a stately dignity. It was Olga Luboff who rendered her now those little services which had heretofore been love's lightest labors for Zenaide.

But the frank-hearted Nadine Valdor soon brought her sorrows to the bosom of the Lady of the Isles. Marie herself awoke, as the fifth day passed on with no tidings of the absent Max. Where did he linger? A thousand new fears were generated by the secret conclave at Hapsal, and then the Countess sought secret counsel of Karl von Geist.

The arch-conspirator was baffled, in truth, for Max von Dornberg had neatly hoodwinked his whilom host. Arline Pulawy's cunning had closed up all her lines.

The suddenly announced arrival of a Russian dispatch cutter with important orders for General Dragonoﬀ brought misgivings to the minds of the little band, now all playing at cross purposes.

A young staff officer soon handed to the old Aide-de-Camp of the Czar letters which soon brought shadows to his brow.

And a messenger from Weissenstein also sought out Ritter Karl von Geist, who had wandered away to the little western bay, to divert the mother's heart with specious tales of the future of the Brotherhood of the East.

There was a savage scowl on von Geist's face when he had read the lines traced by Casimir Pulawy, now furious at the dare-devil trickery of his dangerous charge, and the hare-brained audacity of Max von Dornberg.

"He is here—the young fool—hidden in the Hunter's Lodge! It is not Arline's fault. Come back! for Prince Katkoff awaits you for an important conference! He suspects the general resistant movement of the Oestland nobles. He insists on taking Arline back to Reval.

"There may be, at any moment, a scene, a discovery—murder, suicide, a duel—the devil knows what all! She is beside herself, beyond all reason.

"I send this by a secret-service man. Leave him there

to watch over these two mad-caps. We must cut off von Dornberg from Arline, or else, all our designs will be ruined.

"Katkoff is growing suspicious at her wilful threats to remain here. Any low-browed peasant may now betray the situation, and I am without power to enforce the only dictates of reason—von Dornberg's departure—unless I kill him! Of all Romeos, your Swede is the maddest. Come on! I will hold Katkoff here until your arrival. And I only hoodwinked him at the risk of my life!"

With the quick decision of a soldier, Karl von Geist then ordered the man to bid the dispatch-boat await his own early departure. And he was mute until he had reached the Château, only to confer with the excited old General.

"Pardon," cried Dragonoff; "I must make myself ready for an immediate return to Hapsal. I shall leave in an hour, and will gladly give you a passage. We can confer during the voyage."

The General was soon closeted with the Countess von Dornberg, to whom he confided the alarming news of another brutal attempt upon the life of the Czar while travelling.

"I am ordered to redouble every precaution to effect the safety of the Czarewitch and his family. The mansion on the Esplanade is a simple villa of the better class, though roomy and luxurious. The whole town is given up to the revels of the long summer days. There is no steam dispatch-boat here.

"The mad month of May brings its love delirium to the whole country-side, and my life would answer for any accident to the Imperial blood!"

And so, while Marie von Dornberg, with pale cheeks, listened to her anxious guest, he hurriedly said: "I leave my dear Helène with you. I am sorry not to have seen Max. You must soon send him to me. I had intended to urge upon him to avoid all entanglements with these hot-headed young nobles of the Baltic.

"The Czar of Russia's will must rule, even if the Oestland is 'tranquillized,' as rebellious Poland was brought to its knees! Let him avoid all opposition to the Crown. Give me time, and let him give me his

heart. It is for you to guide the natural course of affection which will make Nadine his wife!" The old General smiled fondly.

"Then they can be called to court, near us, and given a high station or a foreign place. It shall be the price of his prudent loyalty. Watch him, Marie! For he has his father's mad impulses lurking under all your foreign polishing!" And then his hearer shuddered.

"The Princess Zenaide can be fitly refuted with us. I hold my sovereign's favor, and she shall never be rendered miserable if we can avert her sorrows. As to your great patrimony here, there is but one future; the Russian Navy will be enormously strengthened in the Baltic and Black seas. This magnificent island is the last individual holding in the Oestland.

"An Imperial Commission can value it, and the funds, in government securities, will give you the means to keep up the state of a Princess, and to make Max one of our richest nobles when you no longer need the wealth.

"Remember, Marie, you are the last of the reigning blood! Max does not inherit your sovereign rights, and the only safety in Russia now is in the shadow of the Crown. Be warned by me—warned in time!"

The Lady of the Isles trembled and cast down her eyes. She had rashly thrust her son out into the "foremost and focal fire" of the budding conspiracy.

And, as she had been forced to lie in her actions to the sorrowing captive, so she inferentially lied by her approving silence to the man who would save her from the iron jaws of Fate. She cavilled at his conclusion. She must shield her dark confidant von Geist.

"And yet you tell me that the Imperial family are always in danger?" she slowly said.

"Yes," he answered; "but only the Imperial blood is aimed at, not the Russian nobles. There is a rebellious madness abroad since the bootless retreat of our victorious army from San Stefano and the upstart pretensions of the Dolgorouki and her sly Armenian puppet, Loris Melikoff.

"Every week there is some new conspiracy. They come from nobles and students of foreign education.

The Germanized socialist is the most dangerous rebel of our century!

"I wish Max to escape the suspicions engendered by his Heidelberg education and long foreign residence. Send him to me to St. Petersburg for a year. He will work off the froth of his young manhood. If he shares the follies and vices of our *jeunesse dorée*, he will be only foolish. I can keep him out of the danger line.

"Left here alone, to be the prey of the eternal schemes of this sullen reactionary nobility, he may rashly run his head in where it will be lopped off. And remember, there is no mercy shown now to the political conspirator!

"For the Privy Council is Draconian in its severity. The hidden life of the Czar and his immediate heirs is an awful slavery to terror.

"Papers—threatening, outrageous, even insulting—are found everywhere.

"Thrown into the Imperial carriage, pinned on the pillows of the Grand Duke's children, found scattered in the Imperial Loge, and even placed on the very table of the Emperor, in the Winter Palace!

"Poor Princess Dagmar! Even her gentle innocence does not escape! They have threatened to steal away her children, and I have secret orders to report for duty without alarming the Czarewitch.

"So, Marie, keep your Max out of all foolishness, and send him to a conference with me. On his prudence now hangs the fate of your family!"

With flying feet, Countess Marie sought out the Master of Weissenstein, whose luggage was already deposited on the Russian dispatch-boat.

The mother's heart was strangely shaken by General Dragonoff's honest disclosures, and she pointed out all her fears to her secret tyrant. She cried, in her sudden fear:

"You must divert suspicion from Max! He was foolish to go to Leal! When you reach Hapsal, telegraph to him to Leal, to return to Hapsal. The 'Aslauga' will sail to-night and await him there. He may even now be followed and spied upon. My boy! My one boy!"

And with difficulty Karl von Geist dissembled as he raged inwardly at the headstrong lover's rashness.

"I will obey you, Marie," he answered. "But, for our own sakes, bid General Dragonoff tell me all. Then I can guard Max and also advance our cause. Confide in me. For your sake I will watch his every movement. I will leave you my man. He has a passport, and you can safely send me a letter by him. Max will find him to be a Brother of the Order. Now gain for me Dragonoff's confidence, and all is well." It was a master stroke of the human serpent.

It was by a mere hazard that Princess Zenaide, in passing, glanced down the long corridor to where the proud Marie von Dornberg stood, her arms clasped upon the strong right arm of the Master of Weissenstein in a tender pleading for her son's safety.

The glow of the first feeling of satisfied ambition had now passed away, and the mother-heart was aroused by Dragonoff's warning voice. She saw at the end of the path of the revolutionist only defeat, prison, the convict's chain, and perhaps even the grim gallows!

"Her lover goes, and she fawns upon him to stay!" was the Circassian's indignant comment. "It is enough! Von Geist has succeeded. And he will rule the mother by the folly of the son, whom his siren has bewitched!"

It was with a first flood of stormy tears that the captive clung to General Dragonoff in adieu. Even gentle Helène Dragonoff was astonished as Zenaide sobbed: "You will take me away from here? I am so wretchedly unhappy!"

The kindly hearted old soldier muttered: "When my duty is done I shall come back for my wife. And remember, our hearts, our home are open to you! Who but you can watch over Nadine and aid me to keep Lazareff away from her? Remember, you are my own brave girl!"

The quick-witted von Geist failed not to notice the absence of la Princess Zenaide as he took leave of the shrinking Nadine. While the dispatch-boat beat out of the harbor, there were two unhappy hearts throbbing against each other in the old château.

"I dare not tell her," mused Zenaide. "I can not

tell her that her own lover is false, and that Marie also is untrue to a woman's honor! I must be brave and wait. It is this disguised Russian devil, von Geist, who has broken up our happiness for ever!" And she cursed him in her weird appeal to her own strange gods.

In her own rooms, Countess Marie von Dornberg saw the storm-clouds gather and drift over her little kingdom. "It is coming!" she cried, with the awakened fears of a mother's heart. "I have sowed the wind, and I shall reap the whirlwind!"

In these lonely days, until Max reappeared, the spirit of sadness and distrust ruled the three women who gathered around the sweet-faced old Excellence, placidly knitting her lace, with the golden sunlight falling on her silvered hair.

There was the peace of innocence and a calm contentment in the heart of the soldier's wife, who lived loyally under that Czar who had honored her own brave old hero.

The unsuspecting Dragonoff, as the dispatch-boat plunged along, sweeping over the green, curling seas, unfolded his heart to that masterly listener, Karl von Geist.

For, only too well had Marie obeyed her tempter's crafty injunctions, and the career of Max was discussed in all its details.

The old General listened to von Geist's history of his long acquaintance with the haughty young Oestland noble, who was long called the "silent Berserker" by the gay *lionnes* of Paris and the bright-eyed Viennese.

Even the audacious "frökens" of Stockholm had not fathomed the nature of the untried young pilgrim of Life. And thus honest old Dragonoff poured out his soul to the wily schemer at his side. Von Geist saw the sudden empire of von Dornberg's soul gained by the adroit Arline.

"It is a fearful time of unrest! And my own position is one of the gravest responsibility. For the Czarewitch is far too trustful and relies upon the loyal hospitality of the people.

"There, in the little bathing-house on the Esplanade, the three Imperial children are practically exposed for long hours, a half-mile away from the man-

sion, and with only a nurse and a couple of women attendants. A single lackey, all unarmed, follows them distantly in their childish frolics. And there is not even a steam police-launch here. The royal children might be kidnapped, or even murdered, by some mad fanatic! See the unreasoning ferocity of these last nihilistic attempts."

While the brave old veteran poured out his grumbling, he failed to notice the Ritter Karl von Geist's eyes gleaming with all the maliciousness of a latent triumph. For a new and devilish idea had now entered his scheming soul. His mad rage at the cool defiance of the Polish witch who toyed with the fierce-hearted Governor-General was now coupled with a desire to wind a web of intrigue around the Count Max von Dornberg which should leave him helpless, ruined, and with his mouth gagged before the stern tyrants of a military commission. And here, he found the opportunity!

"Yes," he mused, as he stood on the prow of the cutter, watching the gleaming lights of Hapsal, a dozen hours later, while the wearied Dragonoff slept.

"Attainder, confiscation, and the death punishment will follow the discovery of the attempt! His ruin shall be wrought by his own hand! And he shall live to know his mother pleading to me to save him! It will be a sweet revenge for all the years of her haughty scorn! I shall be a master of all the secrets of that bathing pavilion before to-morrow night.

"Any boat can come up unnoticed to its palisaded fence. The palisades can be loosened at night. There is a stroke here worthy of Machiavelli himself!"

Von Geist was the first to leap ashore, and, after a hasty adieu, to drive to his hotel. It was with a sudden shock that he saw the excited face of Max Count von Dornberg, whose opened eyes were gazing blankly at him as the young Count leaped out of a travelling carriage at the door of the Hôtel Petersbourg. Both men were keen enough to dissemble their inward wrath.

"And where do you come from?" sternly said von Geist, fixing his steady eyes upon the young noble.

"From Leal," readily replied the keeper of Arline Pulawy's guilty secret. "I am bringing a party of hunters over to spend a week at Dornberg, and I ex-

pected to find Dragonoff and yourself still there. For you were to be my chief guests of honor."

"I am recalled to Weissenstein by business," coldly said von Geist. "Your whole family, on our yacht, will be here on the morning tide. And Dragonoff has also returned with me; you will find him at his mansion. You should see him at once. The Countess is seriously alarmed at your long, unexplained absence."

Max von Dornberg shouted an order to his coachman, and von Geist, left alone, muttered: "Liar! You have deceived me! Wait! I will make you pay in blood and tears for this! And I shall discipline that heartless human snake Arline!"

As he stood, irresolute, a valet touched his arm. "Colonel Gorski is waiting with dispatches for you, sir, in his own rooms."

"I was a rank fool," growled von Geist, "to bring these two love-lunatics together! I believe the Countess Pulawy has at last found, in her jaded heart, some crumbs of a real passion. I might, however, let Fedor Lazareff press on now and kill this young conquering Romeo.

"Ah, no! That would merely plunge Marie into a stupor of sorrow. I must pocket this lying insult. I will have Katkoff watch his bird of paradise better. And if Max von Dornberg comes back to Weissenstein, Arline shall only lead him more surely into the last fatal trap! My vengeance on her must wait too!

"After the island kingdom is forfeited, my reward will be to let her know that she herself forged her lover's shackles. I will separate them forever by the hangman, unless Marie glides into my arms.

"Love thrives upon absence. Now for Gorski! He must give me the duplicate sets of keys. I will meet this daring youngster and then fool him. He must be made to throw his house down, and only know the dread secret when he is a convict beggar! Yes, this is the correct plan!"

Von Geist stalked over to Colonel Gorski's quarters, only to find a cipher dispatch waiting there from Weissenstein. He tore it open to read:

"Come back here by relay post. Prince Katkoff demands your instant presence. The young fool has

slipped away. Ignore all else until you see me." The signature "Casimir" told the story of the one faithful scoundrel in his pay.

"I have all the post-horses held for you. It is a very grave business!" hurriedly said the burly Police Colonel. "Here are your sets of keys. Have you any letters for me?"

Von Geist tossed an envelope upon the table. It was the love-screeds and spy reports of the ambitious Olga Luboff. "Another love-sick fool!" growled von Geist.

"Send your man at once to find von Dornberg at the Dragonoffs, and have him meet me at my hotel instantly. I will get these treasurable articles safely smuggled into his possession. And you must now secretly send over a couple of your best men to the island of Worms. There will be a hunting-party of these traitor dupes, and the evidence must be gathered up. We need the Luboff, in her brightest moods, to help us now. You know what to write to her!"

"Good!" snorted Gorski. "I will send the men disguised as buyers of sealskin and swans' down over there, to trade with the islanders, and your man and Olga Luboff will make up four trusty spies.

"We will soon have all these hunters in the toils. By the way, I have great trouble to keep Lazareff from quarrelling with the young Count. He swears that he will have that girl Nadine Valdor by fair means or foul. And you know Lazareff has all the vices of a Cæsar Borgia!"

Ritter von Geist brought his hand down on the table with a resounding blow. "That is an inspiration! Tell Lazareff to let Max von Dornberg, for the present, alone. When we spring the trap on this young wild ass, then Fedor can have the raw girl at his mercy.

"For he only wants her estate, and it will suit me to have her out of the way. But, until I give the word, he must hold off his hands. See to it! There is old Dragonoff, who would be like a wild bear roused in the woods. But when the von Dornberg family has met its downfall even Dragonoff will fear to meddle. Lazareff shall then work his own sweet will. I want the Valdor girl put out of the way then. See to it! Your Generalship depends on this! And Lazareff can handle her in his own fashion. I care not!"

"Count on me!" cried Gorski, with a grin. "God help her if Fedor Lazareff ever gets her in his power! He is a rough wooer, but he shall wait as you order. I hold him in my hand, and with good cause. He fears me, with good reasons, too."

In half an hour, after a last conference, which disarmed Marie von Dornberg's lover-like, guilty fears, the Master of Weissenstein dashed away on his homeward ride through the stormy night, sweeping on like the wild huntsman.

Max von Dornberg walked the old Schloss gardens late that night. In the pale, ghastly semi-light of the reluctant day, the fifteen acres of the vast enclosure seemed to be peopled with brave figures of the past.

The rugged walls of the old polygon rose around him, towering fourscore feet in the balmy air. A single bright star hung over the cathedral roof, and the high turrets stubbornly clung to the mouldering walls, where the foeman's cannon and the fires of war had done their grim work of destruction in a dozen sieges.

The shrubbery had climbed up on the old ramparts, and the blue sky gleamed through the wide rents and ragged breaches made by the tooth of Time.

The night-wind moved the tall trees, now rioting in the old tilt-yard and marching over the drill-ground. The pale form of the "White Lady" gleamed out upon the eastern wall, where she was painted, a ghastly form, in the irregular breach made by the Russian cannon.

Max von Dornberg sat down upon a broken column and soon forgot all his perplexities in visions of the brave soldier-monks, the haughty cavaliers, the wild pagan peasantry, and his own lion-hearted Swedish ancestors, who came, sword in hand, to rule over the pagan Border country. And, after all the five hundred years of wasted chivalry, the all-compelling Russ now ruled with iron hand. It was a survival of the strongest.

The passionate youth was secretly startled with von Geist's grave admonitions. For the Master of Weissenstein had spoken to him in easily discerned parables.

"Katkoff has sent an express for me. He is going to send a steam police-boat to patrol Hapsal Bay. He has called General Dragonoff away to a secret council at Reval, and he will then send the boat back under

Dragonoff's orders. With a little address you can easily gain the bluff old Dragonoff's confidence. He is to be my guest soon at Weissenstein.

"Now, remember, you hold the fate of your fellow-nobles in your hand! Perfect your organization, and be our mainstay. You have now the duplicate keys of the old galleries.

"I can easily hoodwink Katkoff, your mother can call General Dragonoff away to her island, and you must be our principal centre of information.

"You will soon drift near the Grand Duke! Remember that you are always safest in your own high social circle! A last word—beware of the fascinations of the pretty Polish Countess!

"She is helpless under Prince Katkoff's influence. He is a tiger in his brute jealousy. And so he has shut her up in her villa on the Katherinenthal.

"Any foolish letters of yours to her might lead you to the fortress of St. Paul! Nicolas Katkoff would artfully forget you there, until the variable Arline Pulawy had found some other *petite amourette à côté* to relieve Katkoff's sternness. Women are made to be enjoyed, my young friend, not to be the strong man's light-minded tyrant!

"On no account must you ever dare to seek her out at Reval, for Katkoff's spies are ubiquitous. Your faith is pledged now to your own order. A single mishap might involve your whole caste, and perhaps even ruin the Countess. You have the country-side to choose from in your loves.

"I will give you news of Katkoff's designs. There is a wave of sudden excitement over some new plots hatched against the Czar! Wait in silence for the plans of the Twelve, and make all possible friends here in open society. There will be a grand Yacht Club ball in six weeks, and you can then call your new comrades together."

"He must not know of my secret visit to Weissenstein!" stubbornly reflected Max. "Arline will outwit him!"

His bosom was torn with passionate sighs, for the woman who had drifted out beyond her own frail network of schemes had already bound him, in honor, to

meet her soon at Kegel, half-way between Hapsal and Reval, secure from the eyes of both the Governor-General and the haughty Ritter. It was a dangerous but an alluring tryst.

He feared to face his mother and the trustful Nadine alone, as well as the openly defiant Princess Zenaïde, and so, when the "Aslauga" bore him away to Dornberg, he had gathered a dozen young nobles for a two weeks' hunting party. The secluded woods of Worms teemed with the game held sacred to the chase of the Lord of the Manor. As for Nadine, she was eclipsed by the burning planet which "shined her down."

Max von Dornberg affected to lightly misunderstand all General Dragonoff's grave warnings as to his social position when the old veteran sent for him before the "Aslauga" unfolded her white wings. "You are young and very heedless, my dear boy," kindly said the General. "Remember, you are the last of two great houses!

"There is near you an angel, waiting with downcast eyes. Then the wild madness of Russian high life! I hope soon to see you a high functionary of the Czar, and your children sheltered by the mighty power of the Crown. Be not deluded! Remember your motto, *Loyal en tout*. There is no resisting the power of Russia."

There was feasting and revelry at Dornberg for two weeks when the young hunters met the cavaliers secretly gathered in from all the surrounding centres of the aristocratic order of the Tête-Noires. The lonely bays of the island rang to the hunters' rifles, and the woods were all vocal with hound and horn.

A strange recklessness had taken possession of Count Max; for, long after the Countess and her ladies had retired, the guest-wing of the château echoed to the songs of the defiant young nobles. There was play, too, and deep drinking in the old Norse ways.

There was the wild plotting of a vigorous resistance to the forcible extension of the Russian bureau rule, and so, many a secret embassy came and went in this fortnight, bearing the verbal messages of the new Brotherhood, which had now extended from Wilna and Pskov, to Memel, Reval, and even St. Petersburg. For the

"Fiery Cross" had been sent out and had traversed the whole disaffected frontier. The Border trembled with a hidden, pent-up excitement.

The long-withheld enthusiasm of a generation soon swept the brave Border nobles along to the narrow boundary between self-defence against aggression, and they neared that socialism which begins in a glittering benevolence and always ends with loosening the moloch anarchist armed with his bombs and dagger against all organized authority. But, in these exciting days, Karl von Geist was craftily silent, and the distant Twelve at Presburg, too, were still veiled in the awful mists of secrecy. And yet they were the compellers of Doom—the dreaded invisible masters of a wild brotherhood of rebel martyrs to be.

"There is the beginning of the end," sullenly said Baron Waldeck to the now anxious Countess, as he pointed to the armed Russian steam police-boat, snakily plying around the four islands of the channel.

"True, your 'Aslauga' can soon distance her, and this boat draws over twelve feet of water. She cannot reach the shores of dozens of the landings, and half the frontier is also closed to her by the shallows, but a fathom deep. We are, however, to be watched!

"Perhaps troops may be soon garrisoned upon us. Our strongest defense is to band ourselves together to firmly resist governmental encroachments, and to win over the noble Czarewitch. He is said to be personally liberal in his tendencies. The beloved Marie Dagmar is a Dane by birth and blood, and if he becomes Czar, he may be led to give to the Oestland the separate Constitution of Finland.

"Look how happy Finland thrives!

"Helsingfors, Abó, and the Finnish shipping have doubled since the Czar called the long-delayed Diet of Finland together. Let us now demand from a new Czar the fulfilment of the oath of Peter the Great, when he joined the Tête-Noires. There should be no overt acts of rebellion. That would be only madness!

"They tell me that the Czar Alexander II. is secretly doomed! We should aim to teach his son Alexander Alexandrovitch to love the Oestland people. We can never prevail by force. Great Gustavus, mad Charles

XII., the world's greatest genius, Napoleon—all have gone down before the gray Russian battalions. And mad Polish conspiracy has made what was once Poland to-day only a land of memories and tombs. Why dig our own graves?"

"Baron Waldeck," cried Marie von Dornberg, "you are my oldest friend. I know that you are Chief of the Pernau Chapter of the Brotherhood. Max has just taken the oaths at Hapsal. Promise me that you will allow no criminal conspiracy against individuals.

"And beg Solms and von Mollwitz to do the same. Max is young and heedless. I have not sounded his mind yet. He has been raised among aliens, and he is the last of our house. Guide him and protect him!" The beautiful woman's hands were clasped upon her heaving bosom in a loving appeal.

"Trust me!" warmly cried von Waldeck. "We are agitators, not assassins; rebels against tyranny, but strong for the right. I shall know of any general movement, and Max shall not be sacrificed!" And so, Marie gave her son to his country.

There was but one present danger in Count Max von Dornberg's mind as he dreamed of the meeting at Kegel with the woman whose fiercely aroused passions had now swept him away from all sense of self-control. He was unable to fathom the reasons of the cold aversion of the Princess Zenaide, a haughty, recent, hostile demeanor which also included even his proud mother.

And, moreover, when his mother had finished a long conference as to his future plans, she had only hinted at the marriage which General Dragonoff fondly hoped would anchor Count von Dornberg safely near the Russian throne. "There is time enough for my marriage," gravely replied Max. "Life is long, and I do not care to live to repent of a hasty union.

"Nadine may enjoy a winter at court with the Dragonoffs. *Souvent femme varie.*" The Countess was not blind to the careless avoidance of the young heiress by her son in their days of junketing, and she saw that gentle Nadine Valdor had taken on a new dignity, clinging closely to Madame Dragonoff.

With a sigh, Madame von Dornberg resigned herself to await the return of General Dragonoff. "He may

be able to awake Max to his future interests, and gentle Nadine Valdor may perhaps yet be the link to bind Max to a glorious career." She was oppressed with memories of Adolf von Dornberg's easy surrender to his awakened passions. And yet she dared not tell either her co-trustee nor her rash son the whole truth.

She also had her own secret to keep!

And thus, Max was left to dream of the woman now sighing in her lonely luxury at Reval, for Prince Katkoff had called Karl von Geist away to a secret conference at Baltischport, and Arline Pulawy was free to escape to Kegel for the secret tryst. For she had been swept away in a mad love for the man who was led to her as a dupe. He reigned supreme in her storming bosom.

There was a rising hatred of Princess Zenaide in Max von Dornberg's restless heart as he silently suffered under her pronounced aversion to his society. His feelings overcame him as he suddenly met the bright-eyed captive face to face, in the tangles of My Lady's walk.

"You shall answer me!" he cried, with anger blazing in his eyes. "Why do you insult and avoid me while you are a guest under my roof? Is this your gratitude?"

The brave Circassian threw off his hand. "I am no one's guest! Only a lonely captive, drifting at the will of the Czar! I break your mother's bread, not yours! Go your way, and pull the house of your ancestors down about you! You made me lie to the Countess and cruelly deceive Nadine Valdor, the poor child whose girlish heart is fixed upon you. I shall never darken your doors after the Dragonoffs go back to Petersburg.

"For I cannot tell your mother that a von Dornberg lies! I will not break Nadine's heart. You did not go to Leal. You went back to Weissenstein, to the woman who lured you to the Hunter's Lodge! And treachery, ruin, perhaps even death await you there!

"You will be the last Lord of the Isles. Exile, sorrow, the cells of the Neva, the horrors of Siberia's wilds, or the hangman's noose will claim you!" The young Count's eyes flamed in anger.

"Then he has spied upon me, and told you! Von Geist has dared to play the tell-tale!" cried Max, transported in his rage. He had thrown off the mask at last!

"Beware of the net! The hunter may soon be the hunted. I have read your doom in the stars. The iron hand of Russia will drag you down! Fool, and blind—let me pass on!" She swept past him with all the scorn of her outraged soul painted upon her stern face in a crimson flush. And the humbled lover stood still and dumbly gazed after her.

Even in his madness he dared not voice the question which trembled upon his lips: "Does Marie Valdor know all?" For his honor now smote him; he heard the voice of Conscience at last.

On this very afternoon, when Princess Zenaide gloomily sought her tower, Prince Nicolas Katkoff wandered along the shores of Baltischport, with Karl von Geist at his side. Under pretence of inspecting new fortifications, the grim Governor-General led the Master of Weissenstein far out upon a lonely rocky point, and said:

"I am summoned secretly to St. Petersburg to receive Loris Melikoff's own orders. There is news of grave moment. Dragonoff is responsible for the safety of the Czarewitch's family while at Hapsal. But I am held to account of them in Esthonia. The whole land is full of ominous rumors. The Winter Palace itself is said to be mined. The railways are all haunted by the agents of terrorism. A policy of relentless severity will soon be inaugurated.

"Dragonoff is old and kindly. There are already whispers of some vague rising in the Oestland—a hidden league of the nobles. If you can discover this scheme, you may be made a Count of the Empire.

"If we could only break up this league, you may even be made my successor, for I would be promoted to the highest station. I now give you full secret power over all my subordinates. You are a man of the world—free, untrammelled, and wealthy. You are above all suspicion.

"Trap these fellows for me, and I will then be able to carry out the secret programme of Melikoff. But, if anything sinister should occur in my absence, I am ruined for life! And so I give you the fullest powers. Here is a cipher which will reach me in St. Petersburg. Ask Dragonoff over to your château.

"Give him a splendid fête. Drown him with flattery, and so gain his confidence that he will ask you to be his guest at Hapsal in return. When the Yacht Club ball is over, then the Imperial family will return to St. Petersburg. They can then share the Czar's own risks.

"We are safe, but Alexander III. will be Czar within a short time! The old lover of sixty-one years is doomed! You might be a Minister if you saved the Czarewitch's life. What was Loris Melikoff before his rise to power? Only an obscure Armenian swordsman! And now he aspires to make the beautiful Dolgorouki the Czarina. He is a cruel dictator, the wildest of all that Russia has groaned under."

Von Geist started in surprise. "Impossible!" he cried.

"Too true!" gloomily said Katkoff. "There are nobles—the great families—even one of the Grand Dukes—a brother, it is whispered—who have vowed the death of the man who only freed the serf to fall into the chains of an old man's senile passion.

"Melikoff has the old Czar hidden away at Tsarskoe Zeloë, under the young beauty's daily persuasions.

"The Holy Synod is even now considering the ukase to make the Dolgorouki, Czarina; the dashing Skobeleff, Melikoff's bitterest enemy, has been sent off to Germany on a gilded mission to keep him from raising the army against the outrage of the coronation of the lovely favorite.

"My head would answer for any attempt upon the Czarewitch, now the only hope of the moderates. Go back to Hapsal. I will give you my own steamer. I leave by train for St. Petersburg secretly. Find Fedor Lazareff. Use him, and guard my interests in my absence!"

A smile of peculiar cunning came stealing over von Geist's composed face.

"Does Arline Pulawy accompany you?" he asked, with an unchanged inflection.

"No. Adelsdorfer, my doctor, will watch her villa, to see that the young monkey does not compromise me. I will come back to Weissenstein and bring her over there. You can have Lazareff and his friends, but no one else, to meet me." Katkoff smiled in delightful anticipations.

"Whom do you suspect?" insidiously demanded von Geist. The Governor-General shook his fist in the direction of the Island Kingdom. "There is the nest of all the treason plotted in the last fifty years!

"That island of Worms! The fool Adolf von Dornberg was exiled to his ruin, but that crafty woman keeps out of danger. The island connects the chain of Runae, Oesel, Dago, and Mohn with the mainland, and its complete fortification is a necessity to bar the open doors to Esthonia and old Ingria, at Hapsal.

"With the shallows properly torpedoed, and our own torpedo flotilla in the inner waters, our whole Baltic frontier would be made impregnable to a hostile fleet. England must meet a new Sveaborg in the line of guns from Spint Head to Dome Ness and Lyser Ort.

"If we could only trap that artful Swedish malcontent, the Countess von Dornberg. To force them out of the island, even by a governmental purchase, would crown my life-long career, for then all the Baltic privileges go down in that transfer."

"If I can do it for you, Prince Katkoff?" began von Geist.

"Then you will be my successor! Watch them all! I've already set Lazareff on to secure this Nadine Valdor, and to prevent young Count Max from strengthening himself by a marriage with Dragonoff's wealthy ward. The island is a nest of vipers. Get me the pretext. I will occupy it with police, send troops there, and then the thing is done. The Czar will boldly Russianize the whole frontier. You shall be the Count of Weissenstein if you succeed. They are not watching you. You are the very best man for this work. Will you do it?"

"I'll do it or die!" cried von Geist. "Give me full authority to act in your name, and I'll bring you home the game!"

Three hours later the dispatch-boat "Livadia" steamed out of Baltischport harbor, and Nicolas Katkoff's train sped away to St. Petersburg.

The "Livadia" never cast anchor at Hapsal, for Colonel Ivan Gorski reported General Dragonoff as having crossed the channel the day before to finish his visit at the Island Kingdom. The hunting-party had separated and the brothers of the new cult were already marked down for a future vengeance.

With a moody brow, Karl von Geist set about charming his unsuspecting quarry, General Dragonoff, for Max von Dornberg had hastily set sail for the mainland upon the arrival of the "Livadia."

"If I did not know that she was under guard at Reval, I would suspect that sleek Polish devil," mused the Master of Weissenstein.

Sly as he was, Arline Pulawy was slyer still, for Doctor Adelsdorfer had confided a secret letter to the gallant commander of the "Livadia."

And while von Geist wove his spider-webs and General Dragonoff fell into the snare, Arline Pulawy was clasped in her lover's arms at Kegel. "He schemes to part us, Max!" cried the enraptured woman. "Let him look to himself, for you are more than life to me now!"

The "Aslauga" was still lying with folded wings at Hapsal, when Karl von Geist returned as General Dragonoff's guest. It was on the very first evening of his return that he made a careful examination of the bathing pavilion on the Esplanade, where the Grand Duke's children daily passed both morning and afternoon hours.

The pretty pavilion had become their play-house, safe as it was in the very centre of the Esplanade, its little dome visible from the Grand Duke's stately mansion on the point.

And thus, a new plan was formulated in the busy brain of the man who yearned to be Count of Weissenstein and Governor-General of Esthonia.

When Max von Dornberg returned, by night, haunted along the lonely road from Kegel by Arline Pulawy's despairing eyes, he found awaiting him a secret call to meet his impatient comrades of the Brotherhood of the East in the gloomy casements of the old Schloss.

And, while General Dragonoff wandered among the splendid labyrinths of Weissenstein as von Geist's guest, the morose Fedor Lazareff was the official keeper of the Czarewitch's safety as the official *Marechal de Noblesse*.

Night after night, the simple peasants, keeping their love-trysts, saw many flitting lights twinkling for an instant in the underground galleries. With superstitious awe they avoided the "corpse-candles of the mighty dead," while Ivan Gorski and Fedor Lazareff laughed

at the tracking of the heads of the malcontent nobles to their secret place of assembly. The Brotherhood was trapping itself, now!

Hooded and muffled with cloaks, the Brethren always passed two comrades on the watch at the door, and every meeting had its spy member wandering in the galleries, who used the password furnished by von Geist. There was an undiscovered Judas in the crowd who always awaited their leader's signal to uncover. And often, their sessions were held with muffled faces hidden from each other. It was von Geist's own fantastic ritual which guided them.

"I only want to track them home," laughed Gorski; "for at the right time I can easily bag the whole lot of fools! I have a set of the keys myself."

"And I only wish to see this clumsy dolt von Dornberg put out of the way. Then," growled Lazareff, "I will make short work of Nadine Valdor's hoity-toity scruples. Old Dragonoff himself will have something to explain. For he has been nesting at the island with these mad rebels."

And so, while Marie von Dornberg waited for her son's return, the young Chief of Hapsal Chapter alone knew that an enterprise of the gravest moment was under way. There were orders expected now from the Twelve at Presburg, and a dozen members of the Chapter were to be chosen by lot, to serve under the head of the comrades who met in the gloomy catacombs haunted by the shades of the old warrior-monks. It was Max's first life-quest.

From Pernau came the significant message, through Baron von Waldeck, to bid the whole Chapter to assemble in the crypts after the Yacht Club ball. The dozen men, already chosen by lot, were to await there the orders to be communicated to their Chief on the night of the great festival closing the summer season.

And, with a strange foreboding in his heart, Max von Dornberg returned to the divided home at Château Dornberg.

"It is strange," he murmured. "A secret quest—and the Grand Duke leaves Hapsal then!" He awaited the hour of fate in silence, though his anxious mother's eyes smote him with a pang of sorrow. He had sworn an awful oath of silent obedience!

CHAPTER IX.

THE YACHT CLUB BALL.

The long July days of blazing splendor were drawing to a close, and the scorched leaves were now hanging crisp and sear on the trees of the thronged Esplanade of Hapsal. Never had such a feverish gayety animated the little sea-coast watering-place.

Though half of Russia was but slowly emerging from mourning over the butchered warriors of the Danube army, while trade was paralyzed, and many bankrupt nobles were being denuded of their estates, the summer colony of Hapsal vied in extravagant hospitalities with the two hostile cliques of the noblesse. It was life *à la Russe*.

The arching woods of Parallup rang back the merry voices of the summer dancers, the forests echoed to the crack of the hunter's gun, and the villas crowning the low, curving shores of the bay were all crowded with lovely women, lustrous-eyed, and troops of merry children raced through the forest and gathered the wild strawberries and ripened hazelnuts.

The brilliant uniforms of the Dragoons and the Paul Regiment were crowding the long reach of the stone-walled Esplanade, where hundreds of the loyal ladies daily gathered to see the Czarewitch good-humoredly wander along to the bathing pavilion, his broad brow unruffled, his honest blue eyes shining out under his close-cropped brown hair. An Ajax, and a man of golden heart.

Stalwart and bearded, a majestic son of Anak, he wore only the great white cross of an Army Commander, gleaming out on his plain blue uniform.

In the morning at ten, the man destined in two years to succeed his murdered father calmly threaded the throng of civilians, laughing heartily at the gambols of the two mischievous boys of eleven and nine while urging on their toddling sister of three.

No one but the Czarewitch knew of the subtle state policy that now kept his branch of the Imperial family

separate from the person of the mighty Czar, already doomed to a horrible death!

It is the trade of great princes to be brave, and Alexander Alexandrovitch, watching his young royal brood sporting in the water of the walled enclosure, often walked alone around the bathing pavilion and smoked his cigar until the Grand Duke Nicolas, the Grand Duke George, and the baby Grand Duchess Xenia were safely out of their bath. It was a brief respite from haunting cares.

In these delightful days, the Czarewitch awaited the coming of his handsome brother Alexis, with the yacht fleet of St. Petersburg, for the grand regatta and annual ball which closed the season in early August. For the Grand High Admiral was Russia's handsomest cavalier.

The two hotels, the manor house of Hapsal, and the neighboring châteaux were all crowded with courtiers anxious to meet the beloved Lord High Admiral Alexis; the ardent ladies sighed to see the magnificent young Prince, whose celibacy was a reproach to their loveliness, often offered up, but all in vain!

The debonnaire Alexis was the hero of many a song and story.

It was he who always returned the Czarewitch's visit in kind. When the Crown Prince left a silver rouble rolled up between his thumb and finger as a visiting card, Alexis had neatly deposited a horse-shoe, twisted up cold by his hands into a corkscrew, on the table of the future Czar! "Say that I was honored with his rouble," he laughed, "and, have left him my corkscrew!"

In the evenings, when the beautiful Dagmar left her guarded mansion at the end of the Esplanade, she was often attended by crowds of bright-eyed ladies worshipping the infantine Grand Duke Michael, a year-old princelet, proudly borne by his gaudily dressed nurse, the proudest peasant in Russia. All seemed to be love and loyalty around her!

There were dozens of clustering yachts now moored in the little cove, and scores of pleasure boats floated upon the glassy waves, returning from guitar and mandolin the exquisite music of the Paul Regiment band floating off over the sapphire waters. And the fisher-boats thronging the little harbor were brave now with *unaccustomed* richness of flags and pennons.

The streets were a medley of rich equipages, clattering Cossacks, gay riding parties, and chevaleresque noblesse, all bent upon pleasure's light behests. For Love ruled the moonlit night, Folly wandered in the dying day, and hundreds of soft bosoms throbbed in pain to think that the first breath of autumn would rob the "Stille Promenade" of all its dreaming lovers, and the Schloss-gardens of its happy, trysting sweet-hearts!

The only sign of care visible was written on the brows of Colonel Gorski, the tired-out Chief of Police, and Prince Fedor Lazareff, who ruled the social festivities by day and drank and gamboled at night, as of old the Danes revelled at Elsinore.

The stragglng newspapers and the carefully searched mail gave no hints of the continued plotting and sporadic attempts upon the life of the aged Alexander II.

Unhappy Czar! A moiety of his subjects hated him for impoverishing them by freeing the serfs, another for the bloody war which had left the Russian chivalry a prey to wolves at the Golgotha of Plevna, and others yet for the untimely passion which threatened to put a mere passing favorite on the throne as Czarina.

But, with the red spectre of veiled murder stalking at his side, Alexander II. was still determined to emascuate the Oestland nobles, even as he himself had seduced and flattered the Finns while acting as the Chancellor of the University of Finland.

Though Tolstoy, Ignatieff, Gortschakoff, Schouvaloff, and Boris Melikoff had quickly succeeded each other as the "power behind the throne," the gloomy old autocrat kept pressing on to the taming of the Oestland pride and the extinction of the Hanseatic nobility. For the policy of the great Peter and the mighty Catherine never halts!

Prince Katkoff, on his return, with redoubled energy urged Karl von Geist on to entrap the sullen and resistant under-party of the Baltic.

With keen acumen, he urged the Czarewitch to flatter the most approachable of the great nobles, and often, in an affected *bonhomie*, the heir to Russia's crown wandered in the park of Château de Bellegarde, with the Dragonoffs, the de Bellegardes, the von Dornbergs, and

Princess Zenaide, and the now unhappy Nadine Valdor, at his side.

Tired of resisting the inevitable, Biren de Bellegarde and his wife urged Countess von Dornberg to cast her lot in with the glittering courtiers who reaped the golden rewards of lip-loyalty. For they had made their own peace in safety, tired at last of a losing struggle!

It was only when General Dragonoff had wearied of urging Max von Dornberg to range himself upon the side of the Czar, that he began to suspect the affiliations of the moody youth whose nights were now often spent in the recesses of the dark casemates. Was the rash youth already a secret rebel?

There was no rest in the young noble's fevered soul, for vainly had he tried a dozen dangerous plans to again approach the passionate Arline Pulawy, now panting in her gilded prison at Weissenstein, under the keen, gloating eyes of General Prince Katkoff.

For the Marble Château was tenanted again by the Governor and his suite, and Reval was left to the grim warrior-garrison.

Every day a cloud of couriers bore orders to Colonel Gorski, whose secret duty of inspecting the Imperial bathing pavilion daily was never neglected.

The loyal old aide-de-camp Dragonoff saw, with sorrow, Count von Dornberg, in a fitful mood, leave the family party at Hapsal Château, and depart alone in his yacht for a cruise of two weeks around the Baltic isles. It was a mere subterfuge!

There had been an ominous visit of Karl von Geist, wherein the two men had clashed, for the passionate lover had pleaded in vain to be taken to the Hunter's Lodge at Weissenstein. But, von Geist was sternly obdurate.

"Give me only a single day with her!" cried the maddened youth; and then, the stern chieftain of the Brotherhood of the East showed his iron will.

"You will *first* keep your oath! It is two weeks yet to the Yacht Club ball! The Twelve may not need you before, but, remember, you will receive your summons at the ball!

"To throw off suspicion, you will surely attend this ball. Have all your men ready at the Schloss! You

know the penalty of disobedience, of dishonor. It is death, and, your nearest friend would deal the blow!" The love-hungered youth turned fiercely on his secret master now.

"I will enter into no midnight-assassin work. Remember that!" cried von Dornberg. "I am a revolutionist, not a nihilist!" It was an ominous clash!

"You will await your orders like a man!" roughly said von Geist. "Leave off playing the love-sick fool. Take a turn on the gulf. Go over to Dornberg. I will direct matters here!"

That night as the "Aslauga" sailed, Ritter von Geist and Colonel Ivan Gorski watched the beautiful yacht skim away.

They were standing alone on the platform, two yards wide, surrounding the Imperial bathing pavilion.

The fence of the enclosed water-space of half an acre was carefully built up twenty feet high to screen the Imperial children from vulgar eyes.

"There goes the fool!" sneered von Geist. "He only comes back to his death! Are you all ready?"

"Perfectly," replied Gorski. "The hidden wires have been laid and carried over to yonder datcha occupied by one of my secret agents. From there, the whole scene here can be overlooked!" The toils were now set for the stag of ten.

"Who will place the officers within the bathing pavilion?" anxiously whispered the scoundrel schemer.

"I can only trust to Olga Luboff," said Gorski. "She will be with them, in attendance on Princess Zenaide at the ball.

"And she will thus know every movement of the whole family. I myself will admit her, and so protect her, standing at the door. I will bring her back to the ball. I dare trust to no one else!"

"And then she can lure him down here," sullenly said von Geist. "The others must not know till she has been taken away. For I must hold the mother innocent—to work out my plots!" He was ravening for his chosen victim now—that fair woman, so long desired.

"Then it only leaves you and me to handle the affair. That is right!" said Gorski.

"And your General's commission shall be given you before the grateful Czarewitch leaves!" answered von Geist.

"I am glad this foolish boy will keep away a few days. For I shall be free to haunt the circle of the Czarewitch, the Dragonoffs, and the de Bellegardes until the ball. As these island people are at the de Bellegardes' no one will suspect the guest who has showered hospitality upon them all!" And the Ritter laughed merrily, wise in his own conceit.

It had been a happy thought, the splendid *fête champêtre*, at which the Master of Weissenstein received the de Bellegardes and Countess Marie at the Marble Chateau, after the delighted Dragonoff had returned, hoodwinked by the royal hospitality of the arch traitor.

But no persuasion could bring the hawk-eyed Princess Zenaide or the gentle Nadine Valdor to brave the long forest drive. She abhorred the haunt of the serpent Polish beauty.

The young girls had remained with Excellence Dragonoff, for already the shadow of parting fell across the brightness of the family reunion. There had been long conferences of the elders, based upon the approaching departure of the Dragonoffs.

The friendly arts of the old veteran had failed, and the plan so dear to their hearts of a future marriage between Nadine and Max seemed doomed to be a failure.

Countess Marie von Dornberg was unable to read the hearts of the three estranged young companions. But she sighed, "Nothing so fatal to love as daily intercourse."

Nadine Valdor sought the company of her sister roses, and with a cheek "paler than should be for one so young," avoided Max von Dornberg, now the reckless social antagonist of Fedor Lazareff.

For the young Count had met his enemy in the open lists, and, in a cold, haughty way, von Dornberg had overmatched him in every form of lavish hospitality. The Oestland nobles, too, all rallied around the travelled young patrician, and the "Aslauga's" deck was the theatre of many a wild flirtation. It was "high life" in its gayest form.

It was with sighing hearts the three elder women

gathered in a secret conclave, while General Dragonoff, de Bellegarde, and even von Geist, gently urged Max von Dornberg to check his unlicensed social gayety.

The crafty schemer ever feared that his dupe might fail him in the drama which he had so artfully prepared to mark the grand summer Yacht Club ball. He had let the devil out of the bottle, and he could not get him in again. Max was recklessness itself.

Marie von Dornberg was a stranger to all her son's secret plans, for Waldeck, Solms, and von Mollwitz sadly told her that Count Max, alone, ruled the Chapter of Hapsal.

The Brotherhood were bound to secrecy in all their Chapter work, and they, too, were left in the dark. So, both sorrow and fear possessed the woman who had raised the whirlwind.

When the Lady of the Isles had concluded, Excellence Dragonoff and Countess de Bellegarde spoke the sentence which saddened Marie von Dornberg's heart.

"There is but one thing to do. Princess Zenaide will not remain this winter at Dornberg, and if she goes to the court with us, then the Baroness Nadine Valdor must take the place which her rank and wealth demand in our household, and later find a future husband in the Czar's loyal circle! For her life cannot be ruined by this frontier isolation." It seemed to be unanswerable.

The Lady of the Isles sighed. "Alas! for the pleasant days of Aranjuez; they are over. Some blight, some secret canker has withered Max's heart! And Zenaide knows the secret, for she avoids him!" Was it a mad passion for the Tcherkess girl?

"Not even death will wrench a secret from that loyal soul!" cried Excellence Dragonoff. "It seems that there has been a fatal quarrel—some hidden trouble!"

With kindly good will, the aged Russian lady unfolded to her husband a plan of her own. The dear old Excellence fondly believed in love for love's sake alone.

"Make Nadine your ambadress. They are both young. Let Nadine, herself, make the proposal that he goes to St. Petersburg with us this winter. I dare not have the tender of a place made, and see this foolish Max ruin you all by a mad refusal.

"His rivalry with Fedor Lazareff is insensate. Russia

certainly has room enough for these two young Hotspurs. And I fear if we older heads are absent there may be a broil, leading on to Max's social proscription."

It was with a gentle diplomacy that General Dragonoff led Nadine Valdor away into a sunny flowering close in the beautiful park on the morning when the returning "Aslauga's" sails were seen glittering far out in the winding channel.

The fair young girl seated herself beside the grizzled old veteran, a fair blossom in Life's garden next the rugged old oak tottering to its fall.

"I knew your gallant father, my child," fondly said Dragonoff. "He vainly loved Marie von Ehrenstein, and she has taken you to her heart. You can repay all Countess von Dornberg's loving care now. We cannot leave you on that lonely, desolate island.

"The Countess herself will winter at Nice. There are many signs of a coming political storm! Max is drifting rapidly into the breakers! I fear to leave him here alone this winter!

"There is Fedor Lazareff, and a fatal duel may either leave our dear friend childless or else imbrue von Dornberg's hands with needless blood!" The fair girl shuddered and hid her face in her hands.

"He will not listen to us. He must hear you! I have sounded the highest officials. The government wishes to win over the flower of the Oestland noblesse. And, Count von Dornberg, when once appointed Councillor of State, on active duty at the Foreign Office, can spend a winter with us in St. Petersburg. Then in the spring he can surely have a first Attachéship, or even a minor mission abroad! It would save him. You are our only hope now!

"There is only folly, conspiracy, gambling, and the wildest dissipation here! Left alone without a sheet-anchor, Max von Dornberg—heedless, gallant, and headlong—many bring the Island Kingdom to an end with a crash!"

"And break his mother's heart!" the girl sobbed.

"Beg him to accept the place! It will be accompanied with a high decoration and a social consideration suited to his leading rank!

"The Grand Duchess Dagmar already takes a tender

personal interest in the Princess Zenaide. You must be presented at court soon, and so you may save Max!

"For Biren de Bellegarde is too old to be his confidant.

"There are dark clouds gathering here! The secret police has been doubled, and I fear the adoption of extreme measures! If Max is found to be entangled in the widespread conspiracy which Prince Katkoff fears, then his ruin is certain! For flight is impossible; failure is predestined to any mad scheme, and Katkoff is pitiless. The government will smite both hip and thigh!

"Beg him to yield for your own sweet sake! See him to-night, and may God bless you! You are our last hope now—the ambassadress of love!"

"I will plead with him," sadly said Nadine, turning her head away to hide a mist of gathering tears. "There is some change—a sad change—in his manner! I distrust this Ritter von Geist, and Zenaide will not tell me why, but she also both hates and fears him!" Hand in hand they wandered back to the château.

And as the old General saw the blushing girl flee away to her own retreat to hide her tell-tale face, he murmured:

"Poor child! She loves him, and he, the fool, cannot see the angel walking at his side!"

Lying in wait for his destined prey, Karl von Geist turned away from the delightful contemplation of forging a chain to weigh down the young noble, with an angry curse, as Colonel Gorski sent him a dispatch from Villa Rostop announcing a fatally untoward visit.

Throwing himself into the first carriage, the enraged schemer nursed his own wrath until, a league from Hapsal, he was driven into the courtyard of a friendly noble's château. His mood was a mad one, but his hatred was self-concentrated on the way.

In a trice he stood, black-browed and bitter at heart, before Arline Pulawy, never so provoking in her first passionate rebellion against his stern decrees.

The Polish Countess received her secret master with a direct onslaught upon his tyranny.

In a rapid exchange of mutual accusations, the beautiful mutineer showed the tigress at bay. And all the fires of hell shone out in her eyes!

"Remember our compact, Karl von Geist!" she cried in desperation. "I was to be mistress at Weissenstein. I have been true to my pact. I have hoodwinked Nicolas Katkoff long enough at your bidding. Casimir is my slave. He and I are but poor adventurers, but, hear me now! I will see Max von Dornberg once more!"

"Katkoff wishes to use me in some dark designs of his own. He will kneel at my feet to obey my slightest wish. He even sent me here to-day. Fear no scandal. There is a merry party of convives, and we can drive back in the moonlight!" She was brave to recklessness.

"I know that von Dornberg returns to-night on his yacht. If you do not promise me that I shall see him, I will stay at Hapsal and work out my own will.

"Katkoff has a datcha here, and he has promised me that I can go to the Yacht Club ball incognito if I choose. No one dares to exclude me, if he is not here to be compromised. And Prince Lazareff will be only too proud to be my cavalier. I am as good as these border Lorelei, believe me!" she sneered.

"You she-devil! You will go back to Weissenstein without another word!" yelled the enraged von Geist, seizing her slender wrists. And it was a fatal mistake for him!

She wrenched herself loose with a sinuous twist, and calmly lighted a cigarette. "There was a man named Serge Maximoff," she began, "who loved a certain nobleman's wife——"

Her mocking voice ended in a half shriek, as the brute clutched her arm, bruising the tender flesh in his iron grasp. He was transported into a mad fury. She knew ah!

"Hold! You coward!" she hissed, as she glared into his eyes. "My maid has the whole story of your past written out, sealed, ready to hand to Katkoff if I do not return to his arms as promised. He will chase you out of the Border, or murder you, if you dare to bully me! I have written to him that you have abused your hospitality, and I have asked him to avenge me. Even the Third Section dare not justify your record when exposed in a jealous enemy's hands. Your game here is blocked by me!" She was standing before him in defiance, for he had dropped his nerveless arms in a sudden terror.

"There are a hundred men vowed to avenge their dead comrades over Serge Maximoff, the secret traitor, the tool of the Haut Police!" She stood there a victor.

"What would you of me?" sullenly growled the Ritter von Geist, now at bay.

"Swear to me that I shall see von Dornberg once more before I leave Reval! For, Nicolas Katkoff has given me my choice of resting-places while he and you do your devil's work here. There are my open passports."

And, with a trembling hand, the Master of Weissenstein gazed on the passports and a letter to Colonel Gorski bidding him charge himself with the Countess Pulawy's comfort if she elected to use his datcha at Hapsal. He was vanquished. He dare not brave that mad lover Katkoff.

A devilish slyness lurked around von Geist's lips as he muttered: "I yield! I swear to you that I will bring him to you after the Yacht Club ball. Only, be reasonable!"

"I will be Katkoff's successor. You shall always rule at Weissenstein, but only, if you obey me. Go back to the château. Make Katkoff your friend. Our paths are trending together.

"You shall surely see von Dornberg again. Your presence at this ball would be fatal to Katkoff's real interests. I will bring Gorski here to prove it. Believe me, I know the field. Our fight is the same!"

"And you will bring him where I am, whether at Reval or at Weissenstein?"

"I swear it! and, no one shall be the wiser!" The defiant woman studied his inscrutable face.

She slowly turned to leave the room. At the door she paused.

"I go back—no one here has seen me! I will not come to Hapsal, but if you deceive me, there will be no quarter. It will be either your head or mine! For I have a woman's heart left, even after my bitter life-apprenticeship."

"You shall see him again!" solemnly said von Geist, as he held open the door, with a low bow. "In chains, on his way to the gallows," he sneered, as he watched her lissome form disappear.

"And you she-devil—human snake! When Katkoff is tired of all your sleek deviltry, I will measure out your reward, when I have used your cat's-paw Casimir. For every insult, your bitterest tears shall flow!"

He sought his homeward way, satisfied with the promised deceit.

But all his joy over the projected trick of keeping the dangerous disturber away from the scene of the coming drama was chilled as he recalled her daring words:

"There was once a man named Serge Maximoff——"
"How the devil did she manage to delve into my hidden past?" The dark thought of a murder was cheered away by the remembrance of Katkoff's blind infatuation.

"When he has done with her, my time will come!" he growled. "But, even Lazareff must not know! Nor Casimir! She shall suddenly disappear! Not till the trap has been sprung. For Katkoff is a madman in his rage. She shall pay me out yet, curse her, to the uttermost farthing!"

Karl Ritter von Geist cursed the inopportune caprice which had led Arline Pulawy to the very gates of Hapsal; for, on his return to the Hôtel Petersbourg, he found that Max von Dornberg was in attendance at a grand banquet given at the Château de Bellegarde in honor of the arrival of the Lord High Admiral, the Grand Duke Alexis.

The Hôtel Salon and the Hôtel Petersbourg were now both crowded with the guests flocking in for the Yacht Club ball, and already the theatre ball-room of the Hôtel Salon was a dream of oriental magnificence, with its wealth of banners, shawls, arms, and superb trophies. The four acres of the grounds of the great white masonry enclosure were decked with electric lights, lanterns, and green arches of welcome.

In the bay the magnificent "Polar Star," a floating palace in black and gold, waited, far out in the offing, to convoy the Czarewitch and the handsome Alexis to St. Petersburg for an important conference with the Czar. The usual policy of the separation of the Imperial family led the sailor Alexis to sleep on his yacht, which was the royal pleasure-boat of the Romanoffs.

For, with a due regard to both safety and etiquette,

the handsome bachelor prince of twenty-nine could not be housed in the mansion now occupied by the lovely Dagmar, her children, and the ladies of honor.

All the summer fleet of the Petersburg aristocrats was gathered in dressed lines around the beautiful ship, at whose mizzen the golden banner with the menacing double-headed black eagle told of the command of a Romanoff in person.

All around the beautiful bay, soft hearts were still sighing over the singular celibacy of the handsomest prince of his time, the robust peer of that mournful-eyed Lohengrin, Ludwig of Bavaria.

Elegant, accomplished, still in all the flush of a virile beauty at twenty-nine, the Grand Duke Alexis had resisted all the appeals of his gigantic brother, the Czarewitch, the very type of a Muscovite warrior at thirty-four, a faithful, broad-hearted, stern, and loyal Russian.

But all the swan-necked maids of honor knew that Alexis's heart was at the feet of a bewitching married Princess, a woman who linked the blood of Russia's most brilliant young soldier Skobelev to the peerless stepson of the man whose conquering eagles once flew over Moscow, wrapped in its sea of flames.

While von Geist secretly chafed until he could meet the man already marked out for a fearful doom, he stole into Colonel Gorski's room, where Olga Luboff had glided in to hear her lover's last orders. For the banquet at Château de Bellegarde was now engrossing everyone, even the watchful Princess Zenaide. The woman met him with fear and trembling.

"Remember," ominously growled von Geist, "your own future and the Generalship now almost within Ivan's grasp, depend on your coolness! Prince Katkoff has placed the whole police of Esthonia under my orders. You are to obey Gorski, and from me alone you are to get the signal to send Max von Dornberg to the lonely Imperial bathing pavilion. And, to cover all the game, you are simply to ignore his disappearance.

"Cling to the family. Do not desert Princess Zenaide for a moment. She is the only one of them whom I fear. Of course, old Dragonoff will at once be appealed to. We will simply hoodwink them and get the three women quietly back to the island.

"Max von Dornberg will be a prisoner in the fortress of Reval, in chains, long before he is missed!

"I have the 'Livadia' lying here with her steam up. Disobey me, make but a whisper, and you forfeit your life! Gorski would end his career as a private soldier in the condemned battalions of the Caucasus. Remember, your very life hangs on your obedience! To-morrow night, you will earn your place at court!" And, with pallid lips, the woman bowed her head in silence.

When the stern schemer strode away, Olga Luboff threw her arms around Ivan Gorski in a transport of fear. "Ivan, my darling! You must protect me! I fear this deadly man!"

And, with words of cheer, the burly Colonel showed her how simple would be her task. "It's all easy enough! Only do not lose from sight any of the von Dornberg party at the ball. Von Geist will give his own orders to twenty of the secret police. Our life-work is done when you have obeyed his single summons!" And, then, in the transports of love, she soon forgot all her haunting fears.

Max von Dornberg came stealthily through the wicket from the Parc de Bellegarde, into the lonely grounds of the Schloss Hapsal, at midnight. He was still undecided in his movements. Some presentiment of a great sorrow weighed upon his jaded heart, for he was now fenced around with many cares.

He had watched his queenly mother's saddened eyes fixed upon him as he gloomily sat at the banquet.

It was impossible not to note the change of manner of Count de Bellegarde and the brave old General Drag-onoff.

For, in his refusing to range himself with the Court party, they saw the coming ruin of the grand old house.

And when the royal cavaliers crowded around the Grand Duke Alexis, after the rising from the feast, his throbbing heart smote him as Nadine Valdor led him out into the moonlit garden. Max von Dornberg feared to look upon the pure young face of the angel at his side now.

Standing there, a pale vision of loveliness, she laid a gentle hand upon his arm.

"Max," she softly said, "do you know that we are

soon to part? That our happy little circle at Dornberg is to be broken up, *perhaps forever*? I have something to say to you—something which weighs upon my heart. Give me but one day out of your life!

“For God’s sake, listen to me! You have the yacht here, with Patkul the Intendant in command. I wish you to take me out for a sail to-morrow. I will be ready at nine, with Tatiana, and Zenaide will stay with Maman, and so, keep that black crow Olga Luboff away.

“For what I have to say concerns your very existence.

“Before we drift apart forever, give me but one day! I shall soon be swallowed up in the court, and you—ah, my God! where will you wander to?”

It was through her shining tears that she smiled when he said, sadly:

“It shall be as you wish, but I fear I must live my life out alone. As you remember, Zenaide foretold that I should be the last of the von Dornbergs to reign over our gallantly held old ocean kingdom!”

“You shall hear me!” exclaimed Nadine. “Fate will stay its hand! I will never give you up, for the sake of the woman who has been my mother! God’s blessing to an orphaned child! No one must know but Maman! I have told her all.”

And then, with a finger on her lip, she glided away, as graceful and pale in her white robe as the White Lady of Avenel in her tryst with Halbert Glendinning at the mystic spring.

“If I had only known this girl’s heart before!” murmured Max, the prey now of a stormy regret. “*Allons!* To save my comrades if I can. It is too late! Fate is weaving the thread, and the fatal shears are ready!” He was on the brink, and but too well he knew it.

He was still under the spell of this good angel when he passed the darkened caverns of the Brotherhood and entered the Hôtel Petersbourg by a side door, for both the great hotels in the square were filled with riotous cavaliers.

And yet his evil star seemed to reign on this fateful night, for he was rudely jostled by Prince Fedor Lazareff, who had been the leader of a riotous supper-party and was stealing out to meet his fellow-plotter Gorski.

There was a flash of sudden hatred in their glowering eyes as the two young nobles faced each other. Lazareff's black blood was boiling on murder intent!

"You refused my hand on the quay, you——"

"Pardon," coldly said von Dornberg; "you can have your satisfaction at once, after the ball. Suffer me to convoy my family to Dornberg. Then, your score shall be settled *à outrance*. You would not brawl, like a drunken peasant!"

Fedor Lazareff's first was clenched, but his enemy's sneering voice had recalled to him the near presence of the Czarewitch and the Grand Duke Alexis.

With a mighty effort, he controlled himself. It would be his absolute ruin as Marechal de Noblesse to disgrace the Imperial hospitality to the gathered patri-cians.

"After the ball!" Lazareff muttered. "And, to the death!"

"As you will," stubbornly replied Max. "A von Dornberg never goes back, and your line know it but too well!" And then, the haughty youth strode past his enemy, never turning his head.

In Lazareff's heart was the fierce lust of murder. "I have got him now!" he growled.

Karl von Geist was alone in his rooms when the young Count entered. Still smarting under Arline's bravado, he imperiously demanded the names of von Dornberg's sworn associates for the secret quest.

In his heart he was wondering if the desperate passion of the reckless woman had led her to call Max back to her side by a secret message. "She may yet be lingering at Villa Rostop.

"The Polish woman is the arch-serpent of lying intrigue. A single mad escapade, and the whole work of twenty years would be ruined!" he mused as he watched Max gathering himself for a mighty effort to conquer either himself or his now insolent master of the secret craft.

"She has the passports. His own yacht is here. They might be out of Russian waters in three short hours! I must look to it! The yacht shall be detained by the guard-boat if it hoists anchor. He is love-crazed!" mused von Geist.

But, the ring of a newly born distrust now hardened Max's defiant answer. "I have not forgotten the motto of the von Dornbergs, *Loyal en tout*. As each brother of our order takes his oaths alone, so he alone must take the risks of life and death until actually on duty. I will have my party ready. Their names will be kept a sacred secret until I have the written order of the Twelve."

Von Geist's blackening scowl was murderous. "You refuse to obey me, the Chief of the Active Brotherhood of the Baltic?" Here was a new rebel.

Max von Dornberg's eyes flashed fire. "Ritter von Geist," he boldly said, "I will keep my trust. My brothers of this quest were all duly chosen by lot. I am the Chief of Hapsal Chapter. Would I not be a recreant cur if I disclosed their names to members of other Chapters? Our orders cannot work both ways. We go perhaps to our destruction!

"You will know the men if you meet them, and you shall share equal risks. But, *their leader is here* to answer for his honor and their safety. I will not tell you their names!" The Master of Weissenstein dissembled his rage. Von Dornberg's position was invincible.

"Then I hold you, on your honor, on your life, to obey the summons!" he gravely said. "You know the penalty?"

"I will not leave the ball till I have heard from the Twelve!" solemnly answered von Dornberg, as he strode out of the room and hastened over the silent square to the yawning arch of the old Schloss.

And he only gave place to Fedor Lazareff, who, maddened with drink, recounted his quarrel to von Geist. The angered Ritter heard the tale with a ferocious joy.

For Fedor Lazareff swore, in his rage, "I will first put him under the ground, and then, the Valdor girl shall be dragged to the altar!

"A single request of the Czarewitch, and old Dragonoff, her tutor by law, will give her to me. This comes to my hand just in time. He shall have grace, but only till after the ball, when the old hen-hawk is cooped up on her beggarly island.

"I have the pistols that I shot von Blenkowitz with, and I can hit a ten-kopeck piece at ten archine's distance."

The delighted von Geist plied the young braggart with wine. "Thank Heaven!" muttered the Ritter, as his drunken visitor's head fell in the stupor of a vinous slumber. "Our secret design is safe! Gorski and myself alone will share the gratitude of the Crown. This brute can brand the absent Max as a coward who fled to escape the duel. Marie will think her son only a cowardly fugitive. I must look to the others. They shall be trapped like rats when he has been seized. I am proof against all suspicion!" He was now jubilant, for the Devil seemed to work for him.

In the shadow of the dark gateway of the crumbling Schloss, a lurking peasant thrust a paper in Max von Dornberg's hand. "The Barina from Weissenstein gave me fifty roubles to ride in with this from Villa Rostop. She is half-way back to Weissenstein now. Beware! Read it when alone!"

The man turned to glide away, but Max seized him!

The trembling hind then fled away in the shadows, grasping the bank-note which von Dornberg had pressed upon him, and on through the peopled solitude of the deserted castle, over the graves of lord and lady, of knight and monk, the excited youth sped, till he was safe in his room at Château de Bellegarde. Arline's letter was a very oriflamme of love, and he forgot all else.

In the silent midnight hour, he thought, with a shiver of sudden dread, that but a few hundred yards separated him from the Czarewitch and his guard, only the park grounds, the Schloss courtyard, the square, and the Esplanade lying between. A strong post of the Paul Regiment and the police station intervened, and now but a stone's throw from Colonel Gorski's sleeping-rooms were the vaults of the traitorous meetings.

The great bell of the Cathedral smote upon his heart like a requiem as he tore open the note. It was in the handwriting of the woman whose passionate sighs had fired his heart as the hot breath of an African simoom.

"Distrust von Geist! He has lied to me and brutalized me. He means your ruin! I dare not write more. I came to Villa Rostop to meet you. You were away on the sea.

"He swears that I shall see you at the Yacht Club ball, either at Reval or Weissenstein. He threatened

me—I braved him, and now, *to save you*, I go back to Weissenstein.

“Guard your every movement. Be armed for the worst! Watch him as you would a mad wolf! For his lying eyes gleamed as he made the promise. There is but one hope. He fears my influence over Prince Katkoff—the charm of the poor face that has drawn you to my side!

“Hear my oath, Max! If he betrays you, he dies, if I have to follow him to the grave which yawns for him!

“But come to me and have your attendants well armed. Once that you are with me you shall know all, and I will save you. If you are in danger, I will plead even at Katkoff’s feet for you—and this wretch has reason to fear me!

“If he did not tremble at Nicolas Katkoff’s very frown, he would have killed me in the lonely Villa Rostop to-day. Come to me, to my heart, to my loving arms! My heart hovers around you as the stars dream over the lake. For, Love is stronger than even

“YOUR ARLINE.”

The paper dropped from the young noble’s hand as his stately mother glided into the room. She was a superb figure as she stood, with wistful eyes, with her finger upon her lip. She seemed the very incarnated spirit of her royal race.

“I have waited till they are all at rest. For God’s sake, listen to Nadine to-morrow! She is the guardian angel of our house. Only through her gentle soul can you avoid the coming crash. For Dragonoff to-night has told me what I dare not repeat until we are safe at Dornberg.

“There is a way, one way only, to keep us all together. Listen to Nadine! Promise me that you will not say ‘No,’ until I have opened all my heart to you at Dornberg!” He was touched by his mother’s majestic sorrow.

“I promise!” murmured the conscience-stricken young noble, clasping the fond woman to his breast.

“Now go, beloved one! I must see that the yacht is made ready for this cruise. It is but a few steps to the landing, and there are dozens of fisher-boats moored to the strand.”

When he was alone, Max von Dornberg seized his travelling-cloak and thrust a flask and a pistol in the travelling-pockets. He seized his purse and a bundle of cigars. Stealing down the corridor, he entered the room where old Elia slumbered, dreaming of Tatiana Pashkof's perfections.

"Hush!" hoarsely whispered the master. "Get up! Dress yourself! Take this cloak! Here is money, a pistol for the wolves, and vodki, with cigars. Get out by the back way to the post-station. Take the lightest carriage and four horses.

"There will be five hundred roubles for you and the post-boy to divide, if you drive to Weissenstein and return by midnight to-morrow! You will find me in the ballroom at the Hôtel Salon."

The old man sprang from his couch.

"*See the lady herself!* You are an old Russian, sly and wise. Bring, locked up in your heart, her answer. I will give you the letter at the post-station. If you are halted by von Geist, you are to know nothing. You have been in the country buying horses for me—that *is all!*"

"Trust me, Barin! I would die for you!" cried old Elia, kissing his master's hand.

Stealing back to his room, Max wrote a few words, while the letter seemed to blaze as with livid fire.

"Dead or alive, I will be with you, after the ball! I now know your golden heart! I am armed at all points. If he plays me false, if he betrays you, he dies! for, I only live to avenge his brute tyranny over you.

"On my breast, your head in loving rest shall lie while I tell you of the villain unmasked.

"For, if he has plotted against me, it is in the shadow of those who will avenge me. Eternal love! Should I be betrayed, then let Katkoff's heavy hand crush him, for I will meet my fate alone! There shall be no other prey!"

It was thirteen hours later when the wily Elia, disguised as a strolling peddler, wandered upon the terrace where the lovely Countess Arline Pulawy sat, with the circle of facile Reval beauties, watching Prince Katkoff and his suite amusing themselves with their pistol practice on the lawn.

Her eyes gleamed a silent welcome as the old man pressed the crumpled letter into her hands.

And, half an hour later, the aged retainer was being wheeled back to the little city now convulsed with the throes of its greatest festival in a score of years. For never before, had two Grand Dukes graced the "Stille Promenade" with their Imperial presence.

The breeze of morning moved the pearly mists upon the face of the waters as Max von Dornberg and Nadine, attended only by Tatiana Pashkoff, entered one of a dozen stout fishing-boats moored near the little yacht quay, which jutted out from the point crowned by the great white mansion, where the Czarewitch Alexander Romanoff was often seen mustering his brood of young swimmers, in the presence of the delighted Alexis. It was a morning redolent with Life and Love!

An old woman and a stout lad of twenty warped the thirty-foot boat out with sweeps, until the sail caught the land-breeze. "These boats are the homes of our poor fisher-folk," laughed Nadine, as they sped away toward the "Aslauga."

"Our Oestlanders often run before a gale, even as far as Sweden. With a life bulkhead at each end, provisioned always for a week, these stout craft often make the voyage from Reval to Riga, to Helsingfors, or to the Aland Islands.

"With a sea-drag out, and all snugly battened, they lie to and often outride the storms which have sent an ironclad of the Czar's Navy to the bottom." She was bewitching in her sailor-craft.

"You are a peerless sailor, Nadine!" admiringly cried the unhappy Count, who now saw the projected duel with Fedor Lazareff as the only obstacle to his learning from Arline Pulawy the story of Karl von Geist's treachery.

"I have it!" he mused. "I will take my associates down in a body to Weissenstein after the Yacht Club ball. There is a Chapter of the Brotherhood at Dorpat!

"The Marble Château is on our way there. If von Geist plays me false, if I get the proofs of any treachery there from Arline, we will be both judges and executioners!" he gloomily decided.

"My oldest friends, Waldeck, Solms, and von Moll-

witz, will join our Chapter with theirs in proving to the Twelve what manner of man their John the Baptist was. And, he shall never know who my associates are in the coming quest!"

As the fishing-cutter glided alongside the "Aslauga," the old sailor-wife sent a parting blessing after the young noble, who had generously given her a ten-rouble note, the price of a whole week's hard toil.

"May an old woman's blessing follow you and the lovely young Barina! You will find my boat at the point always. The hungry Baltic took my good man, and my boy Olaf has no mate to handle her at sea. Call upon him at any time, noble Barin, the boat is yours!"

And then old Elsa, the fisher-wife, joined her hands in a silent prayer as the dainty "Aslauga" skimmed lightly over the rippling blue waters, with the steadfast-eyed Nadine Valdor at the helm.

It was when they were far away from the mad unrest of the summer shores, when the "Little One" gave up the helm to stout Alexei Patkul, near whom lingered rosy Tatiana, listening to a story often told before.

When they had passed the jutting point to the north-west, with its clustered village and tall lighthouse, with the round tents of the soldiery gleaming out in the green woods stretching back to Hapsal, Nadine Valdor cast a frightened look over her shoulder, to where the tall spires and the old castle's walls were veiled by the splendid trees of the Esplanade.

The yellow flag gleamed there over the Czarewitch's summer palace, and not till they had left the line of anchored yachts far astern, did the fair girl speak, with an anxious glance at the Russian steam dispatch-boat chasing along awkwardly across their course.

With a determined glance, Nadine then changed the course, and the "Aslauga" ran off far to the south into the shallows, where the low grassy forest of Parallup faded into the sandy moorlands stretching to far-away Leal. They were safe from all pursuit and spies now, out on the throbbing sea, alone.

She feared to begin her appeal. She had not dared to counsel with the Princess Zenaide, who had been busied on her own secret service for a week.

Nadine Valdor never knew that Tatiana Pashkof, dressed as a travelling peasant musician, had sung and danced on the terrace at Weissenstein before the lordly guests there, in the week when her mistress thought she was visiting her own village for a share of the summer revelry.

But the hawk-eyed Zenaide knew also that Max was no visitor at the Marble Château, and that only the Prince Governor-General and his summer suite held carnival under the approving eyes of Arline Pulawy, a summer queen.

The beautiful Pole had dropped a golden imperial in the girl's tambourine, never reading the hostile glances of Tatiana's sparkling eyes. For the sight of the detested Pole is poison to the orthodox Russian.

But while the rippling water flowed past, and the warm summer wind sang in the humming sails, the heiress of the dead hero of Turkistan, fondly blind, with a fancied sisterly devotion, told her stormy-hearted companion of all the league of love now closing up around him.

Her gentle eyes shone softly upon the reckless young noble, who was now dreaming of the dread summons to come to him, while the dancing music would ring out in the soft pangs of love's pain and the pain of love, that very night, in the great ball-room.

Brave and tender in all her maidenly affection, her heart spurred on by the counsels of the wise old Dragonoff, her bosom heaving with grateful memories of Marie von Dornberg's motherly kindness, Nadine pleaded as with an angel's voice. The hot, arid desert of the present rolled away, and Max von Dornberg's eyes were at last opened to the infinitely patient love which had stretched his boyhood from the fierce apprenticeship of Russian social intrigue.

The splendid proffers of General Dragonoff, the loyal and courtly de Bellegarde, and his mother's pleading through her sweet-voiced ambassadress, at last melted his stubborn heart. He had lived only in the "present moment all too fair" since he had looked into Arline Pulawy's eyes.

"Do not say no! Do not break our golden circle! Let your mother—let my guardian and Biren de Belle-

garde—be heard once more! I fear there are black storms soon destined to break upon these happy shores.

“The Czarewitch will refuse Dragonoff nothing. You cannot decline, without long thought, such a brilliant career. We fond women live only in our heart-life. You must be a man who holds up the family honor.

“Promise me that you will come to me first if you have any secret troubles! Dragonoff will bring the Czarewitch to our succor. And promise that you will not say ‘No’ till we have had our last week at Dornberg—before fate drifts us apart!”

The stalwart man stooped and kissed her pure white brow.

“Little sister, I promise, on my honor!”

And then, while her eyes were still filled with grateful and happy tears at this pledge of his safety, the knell of her unselfish love was sounded in those two words—“Little sister!”

CHAPTER X.

ADrift ON THE WILD BALTIC.

As the “Aslauga” raced back to her moorings, like a startled fawn, Max von Dornberg, with a frank manliness, told Nadine Valdor of his future intentions. “I have some engagements now affecting my personal honor!” he sternly cried.

“Of course, if you and Zenaide go to the court, and my mother returns to her villa at Nice, I will not winter alone at Dornberg.

“Patkul and Tatiana are to be married soon, and thus the Intendant will have a new reason to love his island charge. I will either travel until summer brings us here together once more, or else spend the winter on the Neva.

“And I shall confer with both de Bellegarde and Dragonoff as to the future management of the estate.” The strong man was wrestling with his better nature, and the good angel almost prevailed,

"But you will yield to us, I know," smiled Nadine Valdor, as the yacht's cutter landed them, an hour later, at the yacht quay. "Our whole happiness is wrapped up in your future career, and you cannot be the one to break all the golden charms of friendship and kinship!" And yet one face, dreamy in its passionate beauty, held Max dumb in this vital hour. He dissembled, for Love was still stronger than Reason.

They were met at the strand by old Elsa, the fisher-wife, with gleaming eyes. "Here you will find my boat always! Olaf sleeps on board. And it is at your service, night and day."

Beckoning to the nearest carriage, the Count von Dornberg slowly drove through the leafy park to the château. His last glance of the crowded Esplanade recalled the grim tryst of the coming night, for von Geist, doffing his hat, on the walk gave him the mystic signal for an immediate interview. They were now grimly watching each other.

It was after the *déjeuner* when Max von Dornberg stole away from the château. He had been almost unmanned when his mother clasped him in her loving arms. "Tell me that you have not refused!"

Alas! all that the agitated Countess could force from his stubborn lips was the admission that he had not finally said "No," even if he had not yet yielded and framed the one word "Yes."

"You carry my life in your bosom, Max," the half-fainting woman cried. "I only go to the ball to show my loyalty to our would-be protectors. You must reconduct me at midnight to our home! And at Dornberg, I will soon win you over."

"There is a noble career now open to you!" And she vanished like a wraith, going weeping to her room.

The shaken soul of the young noble was stirred again when General Michel Dragonoff, in all his gala uniform, hastened away from a crowd of orderlies and staff officers and led him into the grapery. The old veteran's brow was beaded with the glow of a sudden excitement.

"Listen, von Dornberg," he solemnly said. "There is some ugly scheme afoot which may bring us all to grief. The guards have been suddenly doubled! The police are all ordered on duty. I have just been directed

to report and take especial charge of the safety of the Grand Duchess Dagmar! No one is to know when the Imperial party will enter or leave the ball-room!

"For God's sake, be prudent! Confide in me! It may save the future and honor of your family if you authorize me to say at once, that you have accepted the gracious intimations of the Czarewitch! I shall be on duty at the ball until the last light is out! Authorize me now to say 'Yes' for you! The two Grand Dukes will leave us in two days. It is the turning-point of your whole life!"

Max von Dornberg paused, and glanced up at a window where he saw a pale face. He followed with his hungry eyes the gentle girl as she called to her side the proud Circassian.

"God bless her!" he murmured.

Then, turning to the anxious General, the Chief of the Hapsal Chapter said, grasping the elder man's hand:

"Not yet! beloved and honored friend. But I will give you an answer at the ball. My mother leaves at midnight. I must have leisure to think. I must have a few hours' time! You shall know my decision before the Czarewitch leaves. For the proffer of an honorable foreign post lays claim to the loyalty of every Russian subject! I am deeply touched."

"I am gratified in my soul. One thing I will pledge you—I will be on watch at the ball! If there should be any madman who tries to violate the hospitality of our shores, the Grand Dukes and the lovely Dagmar will find a rampart in my honest breast! For their safety is our honor. They are our beloved guests now!"

"There speaks the gallant Oestlander—the son of a soldier, the heir of the Swedish lion heart!" cried Dragonoff. "Go, my boy! God bless you! I knew that we would win you over!" And, Max was almost moved to say, "Yes! I accept!"

In a few moments, the old veteran clattered away, still a handsome and dashing cavalier, for the vague rumors of danger had brought out the Shipka Pass bravery to shine once more in his frosty blue eyes.

And then, Max von Dornberg moodily went to face alone the man whom Arline Pulawy had just denounced as a lying schemer. The woman, purified by a passion

beyond herself, had awakened a strange emotion in the young Count's breast.

He felt for the heavy revolver which he had thrust into his bosom. A slowly evolved suspicion of the designs of the Master of Weissenstein at last possessed him.

"Would I save the Grand Dukes or the lovely Dagmar by putting a ball into this fellow von Geist?" he pondered. "I may not act as yet, but there is still time yet to know what work is mine to do! If it is treason's bloody design, I can still keep my oath of personal honor! I can yield up my life, and yet perhaps save the Czarewitch!"

A horrible thought overcame him. Were there other bands of the secret Brotherhood selected from the outlying Chapters?

For a thousand guests were drawn together here now, men gathered from Abo to Memel, and from Wilna to Reval. Was the Polish spectre to stalk again in this calm summer night?

He now felt all the scorn for himself that his own conscience rightly decreed. The last scion of a princely line to be bounden in the iron fetters of an absolute oath to absent and unknown masters! He sighed as he groaned, "I have given my life blindly over into the hands of the Twelve!" And the usual goal of secret societies seemed to be visible here now—a cowardly murder.

And then, with a flash of sudden intuition, he saw that his noble mother's patriotic enthusiasm had been played upon to bind him hand and foot.

"It is the work of von Geist, and yet, she is silent!" he darkly mused. And then, a charitable blindness kept him from dreaming over the sly methods pursued by the man who had glided into his life only to dominate the Lady of the Isles.

While von Dornberg sought out the Ritter, in their boudoir at Bellegarde, the young beauties of the island communed over the great festival.

And, with a trembling voice, Nadine begged the Circassian to aid her in conquering the obstinate Max.

Zenaide started when the girl unfolded all the rumors which had drifted into her soul from the confidences

of the last few days. Could Marie von Dornberg be innocent?

She grasped at the one ray of hope. "If there is evil abroad, count on me in life and death, my darling one!" cried the Princess Zenaïde. "I shall not leave you for a single moment at the fête, for I will not dance."

She fled away then to interrogate the soft-hearted Excellence Dragonoff. The daughter of the Tcherkess kings began to see a glimmer of light.

"If this von Geist is really conspiring with Lazareff to separate Nadine and Max, and if the Ritter would seek to profit by Marie's downfall, this would be their very game. And, I shall be in at the death! For the Czarewitch has offered any boon to one who has lost all, even a name by the sword of the Romanoffs. My birth-right gives me some claims upon the Imperial family, and they own it!"

Face to face, von Geist and Count Max soon sat regarding each other in an upper chamber of the Hôtel Petersbourg.

"I have sent for you to give you the news, just received, which must guide you to-night. You will receive your instructions, between twelve and three, from me, at the ball to-night. The accredited messenger has been reported on his way from Leal, and I shall have a cipher telegram from the post-stations."

"Is that all?" firmly asked von Dornberg. The Ritter von Geist bowed his head.

"And you are ignorant of their contents as yet?" fiercely demanded the youth, his hand clutching the pistol-butt.

"I am ignorant," coldly said the Ritter. "It is for you to execute them with all the force at your disposal."

"Will you know of their character before I receive them?" steadily demanded the repentant dupe.

"Perhaps," doggedly replied von Geist, rising with a vague sense of the coming quarrel. The two men were now facing each other in hostile guise.

"Then you may know," said von Dornberg, suddenly drawing the revolver from his breast, "if the work is of the assassin's cowardly trade, I shall not call my men together, and the first bullet from this pistol will find out either your heart or mine! If you have orders for

me from the Brotherhood, I will interpret them, and not fail therein." He had turned on his heel before the Master of Weissenstein recovered his nerve.

As von Geist listened to his strange monitor's retreating step, he mused: "He will come forward just far enough to lose the game of Life. And now all depends on Olga Luboff. Gorski and I will do the work, but he is trapped even now. For his headlong Swedish bravery will surely bring him to the tryst. And then the net closes in upon him. His voice will soon be silenced forever!"

The Ritter von Geist cheerfully strolled away to give certain orders to post a strong force, at midnight, at all the entrances of the old Schloss. "I can draw the badgers at my leisure," he smilingly mused. "I have their names, true, but only at second hand. They must be trapped at their haunts. And I have the keys, too, as evidence!"

Count Max von Dornberg strode across the great square of Hapsal with a wildly beating heart as he recognized in a passing carriage three of his chosen comrades, the instruments of a blind fate—men who had drawn the deadly lot of the forlorn hope of a yet unmasked conspiracy.

The warning words of Arline Pulawy now returned to vex him. "I will sacrifice my own life for honor, if needs be, but theirs are sacred, unless bravely devoted to the common cause of our country!"

Leaping into a passing carriage, he followed his comrades down the long drive by the shore, past the northern walls of the Parc de Bellegarde.

In a shaded corner of the old bastioned park wall, a gurgling spring broke through the masonry.

Over the low rampart he could see a dreaming lake, where he had listened to the song of the lark in the meadows, as the fair face of Nadine looked shyly up at him, before the Queen of Arts and Graces had come into his fevered life.

He sprang out of his carriage and leaped the low wall, after a signal to his friends.

When the first one had joined him, von Dornberg then gave him the grand hailing sign of the last awful bond of their forlorn hope.

"There is danger of our being captured! We may be trapped like rats to-night, for the police and populace will throng the Schloss courtyard all the night. The town has suddenly blossomed out with spies. You know the Venus fountain by the lake, in the park here, on the east side? It is covered with wooded approaches. Let our twelve men wait there for me, from midnight until I come. I will try to send a messenger if I am in trouble. You are not to approach the casemates again until I call you together. I fear some dark treachery! In case of trouble, you must separate, ignore all, and always remember the Brotherhood's code!

"No member of another Chapter can work inside of ours. Our whole plan is dead unless I join you. Let only one man watch at the Venus fountain. The others are to bide within call. If we are to act, I will come and lead you myself. Find each man of the party and warn them!"

"Your messenger?"

"Will have this password: 'North, South, East, and West; the Stars, Moon, and Sun!'

"Remember, if I come not, keep the silence of the grave, and go home by different routes. You can leap the wall at any point. Do not dare to approach the château or the Schloss! You are dead men if you do!"

There was no gayer cavalier in Hapsal than the brilliant young Count Max von Dornberg, as he graced the dinner at the Château de Bellegarde.

His face was colorless and calm, but his eyes met those of his anxious mother with a fixed, steady gleam, like the blue pole-star.

"He has decided—he will yield!" the happy woman whispered in her own heart.

And the only vacant chair was that of General Drag-onoff, dining, "by command," with the stately brothers, the hope of Russia's loyal line. But, the Little Sister's heart was still quivering in its anguish.

When the mournful-eyed Nadine sought her boudoir to robe her pale loveliness for the crowning festivity, Max von Dornberg deliberately followed her out into the corridor.

"I must speak to Zenaïde, little one," he fondly whispered. "She has been very cruel to me lately. You

said this was my life's turning-point. I must speak to her now, and before you!" Baroness Valdor's bosom rose and fell in a sudden excitement. Had she won the game?

"Wait here!" cried Nadine, her cheeks aflame with the sudden roses of Hope. And, fleet as the gazelle, she then sped away.

Max von Dornberg stood there as calmly devoted as the Black Brunswicker, and sighed as he eyed the merry family-gathering separating for the mysteries of the toilette.

"At eleven, we are to make our grand entrée," gayly cried Madame de Bellegarde. "No laggards, remember!"

When the happy party ascended the great stairway, Max looked up to see Princess Zenaïde standing at his side, a coldly frozen statue, while Nadine gazed at them from afar with wondering, expectant eyes.

"Promise me, Princess," the young noble gravely said, "as I leave the ball, to escort my mother home at midnight, that you will not lose Nadine from sight for even a moment until my return. There may be some strange happening, and upon your wit and courage alone I rely for her safety. I have a few words first to exchange with General Dragonoff, and then I will be near and watch over you both until our whole party retires. I ask this last favor for her sake, not mine, as I may soon pass out of your life! May I be your debtor for one last favor?"

And then, Princess Zenaïde, smitten at heart by the agony written on his face, laid her hand in his. "I promise! The air is full of mystery. Dragonoff seems to be unduly excited, and there have been gossips already busy, for all the troops are under arms, and even the yachts, police-boats, and guard-vessels have formed a line across the harbor from the quay to the mansion-house point. No vessel will be allowed to leave the port to-night!" And she left him then, with a kindlier glance in her eyes than he had dared to hope for.

When Max von Dornberg reached his room he devoted himself to *la toilette des condamnés*. A last hideous thought came suddenly to appall him.

How could he verify the orders of the distant Twelve

of Presburg? If he failed in his honor, he would surely be branded as a recreant and a coward—the Chief of Hapsal Chapter! If he led the men chosen by lot to a concealed snare, their innocent blood would be on his head.

“I will have one ready, silent friend,” he mused, as he hid a twelve-inch Swedish hunting-knife in his bosom. “This, at least, will make no noise!” And he paced the room like a wolf, pondering over every word of Arline’s warning. “If we had only met!” he sighed.

There was the gleam of a thousand lights, the soft strains of an exquisite waltz, and the kaleidoscopic beauty of five hundred lovely women making the ball-room and corridors of the Hôtel Salon a dazzling Vanity Fair, as the party from the Château de Bellegarde entered the corridor.

It was General Dragonoff, a stately, martial figure, who led the Lady of the Manor and her guests to a reserved fauteuil near the dais of the Imperial party.

Count Max von Dornberg escorted his stately mother, who was as fair a Swedish princess as ever graced Stockholm’s palace halls.

He drew a gasping breath of astonishment as he marked the resplendent loveliness of the two diverse beauties of Dornberg. He had never seen them in full panoply before.

The Princess Zenaide was the Diana of her immortal mountains, chaste, majestic, and calmly noble.

Upon Nadine Valdor’s face had descended the rosy glow of shy new hopes clustering in her innocent heart, for Marie von Dornberg had whispered: “*He will yield to-night!* General Dragonoff will win him over!”

There were a score of cavaliers already pressing forward, and Max von Dornberg forgot the serried lines of splendid grenadiers, the waving figures of the witching dames, the dazzling sheen of jewels, the regal richness of a hundred uniforms, the brilliant court functionaries, and the scores of thrilling Russian beauties’ faces, now mutinous in their ardent challenge to their admirers.

The whole scene faded away, and he saw there only that one trusting girl’s face, with the light of a new hope

shining in her happy eyes. He knew at last the angel at his side!

"Little one, you must be happy to-night," he bent down and murmured.

"You only can make our golden circle complete, Max!" she whispered. "Give me your answer to-night! Say yes! Remember, it is the turning-point of your career! *For my sake!*" she pleaded.

The air was laden with perfume, and the summer night brought the odor of the lilacs and the fragrance of the new-mown hay drifting in from the sleeping fields around the happy village.

"Give me but another three hours," he said. "I may then be free to speak. Or I shall have to keep my word and have our last conference at Dornberg; but if an angel can prevail, you shall have your wish! For, I cannot tell you all yet, little one!"

"Trust me, Max, all in all! It is my whole life to know your future safe, your grand line cemented into the national service of Russia."

He was bending over her, when he caught the eyes of Olga Luboff intently regarding him. There was a glare of frightened intensity which caused him to turn his head. And so the golden moment was lost to them forever.

In the doorway, stood Karl Ritter von Geist, and at his side the magnificently uniformed Colonel Ivan Gorski, with Fedor Lazareff, the arbiter of the ceremonies as the Marechal de Noblesse. There was no mistaking the insolent fixedness of Lazareff's coolly measured glances. He was devouring the beauty of that rosy Hebe, Baroness Valdor.

And then, Max von Dornberg stiffened into stone, for every sinew was as nerved as the Pawnee captive who bounds away to run the gantlet of the murderous Sioux. "My mad vows! My foolish leap in the dark! But for this, there is a broad road of honor open to me, and——" He ceased, for the crash of the Russian national hymn betokened the arrival of the Imperial guests.

Through two lines of the assembled flower of Russia, the royal party passed slowly onward to the canopied dais, where the honorary guard of officers of the Paul Regiment awaited them.

Max von Dornberg forgot the witching eyes of beauty, the whole pageant of the superb summer night's dream, in gazing upon the marble face of von Geist, standing alert and stern at the entrance of the main corridor. He was as mute as a masked executioner leaning upon his axe, and then, with a bitter heart, von Dornberg turned away to his stately mother and the lovely woman under his charge.

It was after the Imperial Highnesses had gravely retired, after watching the magnificent scene for an hour, that Count von Dornberg silently arose, and, whispering a few words of last caution to General Dragonoff, led his mother out of the nearest side entrance into the garden.

As he quitted the room, he saw Olga Luboff start, as if in a sudden terror.

But the etiquette of the Russian *dame de compagnie* kept the black-browed Muscovite standing silent behind the chair of the Princess Zenaïde, as haughty in her ceremonial demeanor as Anne of Austria. Olga dared not leave for an instant, even to obey von Geist's imperative secret signal.

It was but a quarter of an hour before the Count von Dornberg descended from his returning carriage, at the main façade of the Hôtel Salon. The departure of the royalties had now given a full license to the masque of Love which ruled the fleeting hours.

The gilded youth of St. Petersburg, the hardy yachting aristocrats, the jewelled boyars, the reckless officers, and the haughty nobles of the Tête-Noires, were now clasping to their ardent hearts the throbbing loveliness of a hundred patrician lines.

In the wild, stormy-hearted Russian woman of rank there dwells a fascination fatal to him who falls under the personal magnetic charm of these voluptuous daughters of Rurik. And then, Love's throbbing pulses quickened at the music which bid the heart love.

Count von Dornberg was startled by his mother's impulsive farewell, as she crossed the arched entrance of the Château de Bellegarde. "Be watchful; be not a moment off your guard!" she cried. "There is a feeling in my heart that I would not have you return to the ball. Oh, for Dornberg once more! Our Island Kingdom! Max,"

she cried, "do not leave Dragonoff! Be near him, and bring Nadine and Zenaide back to me at once! Leave them not! I saw that devil Lazareff hovering in the distance!" Then Max's heart leaped up in a wild oath to protect the "Little Sister."

With a hasty caress, the excited noble had left her, and, as he edged his way along behind the crowding throng of dancers, he felt in his heart that there was the shadow of some great disaster brooding over the line whose blood coursed in his veins.

And as yet, no mysterious summons from the Twelve!

Neither Gorski, von Geist, nor Lazareff were visible in the grand corridor, but he could see the faithful old General Dragonoff bending over the two beautiful faces of the women with whom his future life was linked.

For on this night, he felt that he dared not break the chain of Love! The silent appeal of Nadine Valdor's eyes had melted the rock of his stubborn heart. And he looked onward down the columned years to see that sweet face still at his side!

There was the sullen-faced Olga Luboff still there on guard behind the two beauties, who had steadfastly refused all their pleading cavaliers. There were scores of mad dancers already in the ring, urged on by the insidious appeal of a music witchingly rendered by the wine-crazed Tziganes. And so far no covert approach of the detested Lazareff. And still, no summons from the Twelve!

"If he would dare to molest them I would drive my knife into his heart!" angrily growled von Dornberg, as he strove to elbow his way behind the dancers, with his eyes glued upon the two women now committed to his honor for protection. "My God! I cannot abandon Nadine to this Walpurgis-night fever of Russian high life!" he thought.

"There must be some way out of all this!" He dared not examine his own heart, but a vague fear of some covert treachery now chilled his very marrow, and the three ominous faces across the hall were still absent. *Where were his secret orders?*

Suddenly, he saw Olga Luboff glide away to an open door across the hall, the very one by which the suite of the Grand Dukes had retired.

And then, for a single moment awaiting her there, he gazed upon the tall form of Colonel Ivan Gorski, the burly Chief of Police!

But another moment, and that menacing figure was gone! The door was closed, and Olga Luboff glided back unconcernedly.

As Max von Dornberg was swept to and fro by the fluctuating background of the crowding spectators, he could easily see the faces of the now anxious comrades of the Catherine Institute.

And already he had caught an answering signal from the eyes of the tall Circassian Diana. She had seen him! All was well!

The face of his "Little Sister," the bright angel of their lonely house, was hidden as she turned to speak for a moment to General Dragonoff, who was now leaning over Baroness Valdor, the latter engaged in an earnest conversation with Mademoiselle Olga Luboff.

With a low bow, a young officer then approached, and Max von Dornberg, to his surprise, saw the *dame de compagnie* piloted across the hall to the grand corridor entrance, through the ranks of the flitting dancers, and, turning his head, he beheld the Ritter von Geist and Prince Fedor Lazareff again at their post.

Then, resolutely urging himself forward, he approached the line of fauteuils, where Cupid was now doing deadly work at short range.

There were near them opened French windows, giving access to the now deserted gardens, where a crowd of curious peasants, soldiers, police, and serving-women hovered outside in the gloom, to note the splendors of the Arabian Nights scene within.

Five yards more, and von Dornberg would be again at his post.

There seemed to be some strange illusion affecting his senses, for when he turned his head *both the patriotic girls had vanished!*

General Dragonoff's tall form was still seen towering in the middle of a quadrille, but neither Nadine nor the Princess Zenaide were visible.

The Countess de Bellegarde and Excellence Dragonoff were still the delighted centres of a squad of bediamonded dowagers on the dais, now given over to the Lady of the Manor.

And yet, Max von Dornberg had just seen Nadine Valdor lean over and pick up a paper which had fluttered to her feet! Where were the orders from the Twelve? He dared not think of them now.

As he turned his head and gazed toward the distant corridor, he vainly strove to discern von Geist and the *dame de compagnie*.

The crowd surged forward again, and all was confusion.

Just then the great cathedral bell boomed one o'clock, and the mournful note vibrated in the thick, moist air, for a summer fog was slowly creeping down from the forest. It was a funereal note, and the knell weighed upon his anxious heart.

"Two hours more to three o'clock, and no orders yet! Perhaps the whole scheme is a failure! Some mad mummery——" He started as a slender hand gripped his arm, and the voice of Princess Zenaide reached him through the opened French window, in a low whisper.

"*Quick, for your life! Come! For God's sake, Max!*" and, darting back, he was hurried through a good-humored crowd of moujiks into the dense gloom of the gardens of the Hôtel Salon.

Beside him, in their ball dresses, were the two women whose lives now seemed to be the very thread of his awakened soul.

While Nadine whispered in his ear a disclosure which made his brain reel, he stood irresolute there, pistol in hand, as the ready-witted Princess Zenaide plucked the shawls and peasant-cloaks from a trio of laughing country wenches.

"There are ten roubles!" murmured Max, who now bent over Nadine and murmured, "Whither?" as Zenaide wrapped around their heads the fleece-wool headscarfs denuded from the grinning maids, who saw only a masquerading frolic. He was being dragged along, he knew not whither.

But Zenaide and Nadine had hurried the excited noble out of the back gate of the great hotel garden, into a dingy, darkened alley, where the three found shelter in a vacant, stone-walled building plot.

The mists were drifting lower from the saturated clouds, and the throbbing of the distant waltz now

seemed to them a very mockery of hell. Nadine had clasped her companion's hands in a frenzy of terror.

"Tell me all!" softly whispered Zenaide, as she drew her companion's head down to her stately bosom. It was the hand of Fate at last!

Dornberg's strong arm upheld the half-fainting Nadine as she gasped: "Olga had been fretting and demanding Max every moment, until I saw him returning.

"She left me, and, returning, handed me a note for Max, and bade me instantly give it to him, alone, the very moment that he returned, for General Dragonoff had sent her imperatively over to Ritter von Geist with a message, inviting him to the last breakfast before our departure.

"Olga dropped a paper, which I supposed was the note when I picked it up. *I read it!* It is in von Geist's handwriting, and says:

"'Lure him with you out to the back garden entrance. Give him the note herewith, and tell him to meet me instantly on the platform of the Bathing Pavilion of the Grand Duke. Let no one see you with him after you leave the hall. Say nothing to any one! Keep in the dark avenue.

"'Tell him I could send no one else on account of the two ladies.

"'If he will walk over to the Pavilion with you, fear nothing! Gorski is in hiding there, and von Dornberg will never appear again! Remember, say nothing! He will not be searched for till morning.

"'Stay with the women, and go to the island with them. The police guard-boat will soon be at hand over there to protect you. On your life, act quickly now!'"

While they whispered, a corporal's guard of soldiers clanked by, and one man stopped to light his pipe at the door of the yard. Their hearts stopped beating in terror!

"My God!" groaned von Dornberg. "Alone, in the middle of the night—*helpless!*"

"Come!" suddenly gasped Nadine. "We are saved! *There is old Elsa's boat!*" And then, with a frenzied grasp, she dragged her companions along to the deep shades of the inner Esplanade, and the three figures hastened westward in the light mist.

Every step now widened the distance between them and the Bathing Pavilion, where Gorski's police lay ready to seize upon their unsuspecting prisoner. For the snare was set, and the grim hunters were at hand with swords drawn.

Five minutes brought the fugitives to the yacht quay, where the heavy tread of the doubled sentinels around the Grand Duke's darkened mansion resounded from above.

"Wait here!" softly whispered Nadine, as she crept down to the line of fisher-boats. She seemed to have the heart of a tigress in her gentle bosom now.

"You are lost," gasped Princess Zenaide, "unless Nadine can take you out through the fleet and hide you on some lonely sand-spit, until we can get a vessel to take you away. Over there among the islanders, on the little sealing-rocks, you are safe. Tell me, who betrayed you?"

"Karl von Geist! May God burn him in the everlasting flames of hell!" groaned the still astounded von Dornberg. "Zenaide!" he breathed his prayer to her. "My mother must know nothing till Dragonoff can be warned by you. Simply ignore my flight!"

"Great God!" he groaned to himself. "There is Lazareff's debt of honor! Ah! That can wait!"

The slight figure of Nadine Valdor was seen, as she clambered up the bank. "Not one word now!" was the brave girl's pleading whisper.

"Come on! The boy Olaf is true! There is food and water in the boat. He has got peasant garb to cover us, and taken a dozen moujik shawls and boat-cloaks out of the other boats."

"And I?" demanded Zenaide.

"You are to go home by this winding road behind the Esplanade. Say nothing till you are awakened from your sleep, and then talk only to Dragonoff! Let him act with my mother and de Bellegarde. But, as this was to be a mysterious disappearance, say not a word! I charge you all to return at once to Dornberg and keep Olga Luboff with you.

"She will not dare to show any signs of the loss of her letter. She may think that it was dropped elsewhere. The fact is, our refusal to join in the dances

alone prevented von Geist from giving me these fatal orders without betraying himself.

"It was Olga's foolish blunder."

And, with a sudden frenzied desire to baffle the hell-hounds, Count Max gave her the passwords for his doomed mates.

"You will find a man waiting on guard at the Venus fountain. *Tell him that all is lost!* That I have fled, and to warn all my men to return to their homes! And seal this in your bosom forever! For I was betrayed by a humbug patriotism to be only food for the Russian gallows!"

"But you need money!" cried Zenaide.

"Ah, you do not know my islanders!" said Nadine, as she clung to her beloved comrade and sealed her lips with kisses.

"Go, now, darling! I must save Max! I will save him, or never return!" She was dauntless in her virgin innocence.

"And I, will not lose Olga from sight!" grimly said Zenaide, as she threw her arms around Max. "I wronged you—forgive me!" she whispered. "I will repay Olga Luboff, *fear not!*" And then, she pushed them away, as they lingered irresolute.

In three minutes, the swing of the heavy sweeps was faintly heard, as the alert fisher-lad, aided by Max, worked the cutter along at a fair pace over the oily water.

And, lying prone on the bottom of the boat, Nadine Valdor waited until they should pass the line of the anchored yachts.

But vodka and feasting had done its appointed work. The lights gleamed gayly through the gathering mist as the fisher-boat stole along the shore in the darkened shadows of the Grand Duke's mansion.

There was not a hail or a challenge, and the rising breeze wafted over to them the swelling music of the gay mazurka, in which the full-bosomed beauties of the Hapsal summer court were now bending to the enticing strains, swaying as flowers before the summer gale.

Never had Max von Dornberg heard music as sweet as the rattle of the rigging, when the mainsail was drawn apeak,

The stolid boy then loosed the jib, and, with Max von Dornberg at the sheet and the speechless Nadine at the tiller, the fisher-boat raced smartly away, swaying lightly under the quickening impulse of a freshening wind.

"Hurrah!" cried the young heiress. "We are out of the lines! You must quickly get into a peasant's fishing-garb."

"For we have now only steam to fear, and, with the coming of daylight, we may be pursued. You may have to hide on the lonely shore! I am safe against all questioning. I simply know nothing of you."

"My own clothes?" demanded the Count.

"Tear them up! Cut them up, and then drop them overboard, bit by bit!"

"And, your ball dress?" said the young noble.

"I have nothing to fear! *I am innocent!*" cried Nadine Valdor, as she hastily wrapped herself up in a heavy sea-cloak.

And, while the fog closed down behind them, and the stars lighted their way to the west, the two fugitives fell into the easy protection of the French tongue. In an hour, they had covered every point of the supposed plot.

"If you had only listened to me, Max!" cried Nadine, as he kissed her hands in a sad silence.

At last, Max von Dornberg knew all the secret of von Geist's baseness! "The whole thing is merely a vile scheme to forfeit my mother's sovereign rights. Sooner than that, I will put a ball through my head! I have kept my knife and pistol! Fool! I only suspected some personal violence or treachery from him or Lazareff! But they would strike at our flag, our line, our home!"

"You belong to me now, Max!" boldly cried the sweet-faced Nadine. "For if I save your life, you have a work left to do—to guard your mother's rights, to expose this low mouchard's scoundrelism, and, then, with Count de Bellegarde and General Dragonoff's help, we are irresistible."

And, Max von Dornberg sadly recalled the Brotherhood of the East. He hung his head in a guilty confusion, and, covering Nadine Valdor up warmly, he took the tiller when she had skilfully laid out the course. "I must sleep, so that I can think and devise a plan of escape for you!" she murmured, as her tired head

dropped upon the bundles of peasant rags. The queen rosebud of the ball was the happiest girl in Russia, as she nestled among the rough tatters of the friendly fisher-folk.

And now, left far astern, there were squads of hungry soldiers and sullen police searching every nook of Hapsal!

For the descent upon the casemates of the old Schloss had only yielded a harvest of swarming bats, and Ivan Gorski and the raging Ritter von Geist were cursing in their baffled rage. *Where was their victim?*

But one house in Hapsal was safe from the merciless spies. It was the Château de Bellegarde, where the loyal old Lord of the Manor slept all unsuspecting of any trouble.

The two ladies of the dowager dignity had gone to their rest, thinking that Count Max and the two beauties were wandering in the Schloss-garden with the crowd attracted by the superb *fête de soir* which had been arranged for the villagers.

Gorski and von Geist conferred late with each other. Olga Luboff was as yet unconscious of the clumsy loss of her letter.

"We dare not act until we know that he is not hidden away at the Château de Bellegarde. But then, we can telegraph to every port and station, and when we report to Lazareff and Prince Katkoff our discovery at the Bathing Pavilion, Count Max von Dornberg will be declared an outlaw, and out of the pale of the law. But, who the devil can have warned the other conspirators? Is the young fool hiding in the old Schloss?" They were baffled at every turn!

But with the daylight came a public clamor which roused up the frightened burghers and set the whole summer colony in a wild panic of excitement.

Even the two Grand Dukes were white-faced, as Colonel Ivan Gorski caused General Dragonoff to examine the discovery of a damning plot to assassinate the Czar's sons, and even the tender children of the affrighted Dagmar. *It was a horrible discovery!* And, a storm of fear and rage filled all hearts.

Besides, there was the shock of a crushing sorrow at the Château de Bellegarde, where the Countess Marie lay sick almost unto death.

Only the Princess Zenaide, with an unmoved countenance, aided Olga Luboff in nursing back the flickering spark of life, and, with a gentle condescension, the Circassian conferred with her startled companion.

And Olga Luboff smiled in her heart. Her work was all done, and she was undetected!

General Dragonoff, alone, seemed to retain his composure. For, Biren de Bellegarde, himself, had aged a score of years.

The half-drunken Marechal de Noblesse, Prince Fedor Lazareff, was loudly boasting over his cups that Max von Dornberg had fled to avoid the coming duel, and had eloped with his secret paramour, the Baroness Nadine Valdor.

And, while the Ritter Karl von Geist sadly acknowledged the Count's evident cowardice, he was now busied with the *procès verbal* of the discoveries of the Bathing Pavilion, for both Colonel Ivan Gorski and General Prince Nicolas Katkoff had secretly charged him with a special report. The whole city was wildly excited!

And only Princess Zenaide kept her calm and even way, for she had seized upon the returning Elia.

A fast khibitka bore the rosy Tatiana Pashkof away to Weissenstein, the bearer of a letter in which, for the first time in her life, the proud Zenaide availed herself of the sweeping privileges of anonymous correspondence.

There was nothing to indicate any unusual happening in Hapsal when the sun reached the meridian but the almost instant depopulation of the two great hotels. At each street-crossing, a mounted dragoon watched everyone of the vehicles streaming away, while a turbaned gend'arme, sabre in hand, occupied each entrance to the old Schloss.

A line of sentinels grimly stalked upon the long Esplanade, and stern police agents guarded the sealed doors of the Imperial bathing pavilion.

In the silent *saute qui peut* of the growing day all the glories of the superb ball were soon forgotten! The white-winged yacht fleet was already stretching away in flight down the bay in a gleaming silver sheaf of sails, and the vast ball-room of the Hôtel Salon was deserted.

A few sentinels and police agents were making merry

with the débris of the great supper tables, when General Dragonoff, Prince Fedor Lazareff, the Public Prosecutor, and the Master of Weissenstein narrowly inspected the ball and supper rooms. The reign of Pleasure was rudely broken.

With this official cortège, the Colonels of the Paul Regiment and the Dragoon Guards marched under the escort of Colonel Ivan Gorski, his eyes gleaming with an undisguised triumph.

The frightened citizens hovered mutely in their shops, while the *persiennes* were down in all the sleeping rooms, where beauty, grown suddenly wise, slept, where no late larks gave warning. The signal for "close hiding" had been passed on from mouth to mouth!

Passionate hearts throbbed sadly in these darkened bowers of beauty, for every fond tryst of love was broken by the panic of the day. Only the servants, sneaking from house to house with grave faces, industrious ants of gossip, told of the throngs pouring out on all the country roads.

Not a single vehicle was to be seen lingering on the great square, and a company of the Paul Regiment, with stacked arms, lounged around the deserted music pavilion on the Esplanade.

Alas! for the incense-breathing woods of Parallup! Alas! for the dreamy reaches of Bellegarde Park! Alas! for the sweet solitude of the "Stille Promenade!" There were no sighing lovers wandering in glade or dell, or by the sparkling sapphire waters!

The drinking booths and bath-houses were all shut. There was a half company of soldiers on guard at the quay, and the Imperial post and telegraph office were strictly closed to the public. Every moment the street echoed to galloping orderlies dashing to and fro with telegraphed messages or sudden orders. The stern rule of the Russian had come at last!

At all the entrances to the Parc de Bellegarde, servants in the foresters' livery of the Lord of Hapsal, *couteau de chasse* at side, grimly forbade ingress to the curious.

Only the boldest promenaders knew that three great barges from the Imperial yacht "Polar Star" were in waiting, moored at the private boat-house steps of the Grand Duke's mansion.

When the official party left the Hôtel Salon, after examining the ball-room, the banquet-hall, and gardens, the hostelry was closed to the public, for a wild rumor had been bruited about that the whole ball-room had been mined, and that electric wires had been found leading to a house commanding a plain view of the Schloss, the Grand Ducal mansion, the Hôtel Salon, and the Bathing Pavilion. Fear and terror now ruled every heart!

Not a single carriage was allowed to pass the lines of the Paul Regiment save one containing General Dragonoff, the Count de Bellegarde, and Prince Fedor Lazareff, the active Marechal de Noblesse.

An hour later, a splendid team of four black Orloffs dashed into the almost deserted summer city bearing Governor-General Nicolas Katkoff, brave in his round white cap, golden-trimmed, befrogged white linen summer uniform, and his gleaming epaulettes.

An alert staff officer sat at his side, and a half dozen weary Cossack lancers straggled along after the foaming horses. There was all the hurry of an immediate embarkation of the royal party.

And then, in a half hour, the stately "Polar Star" swept down the bay, which was now closed by gunboats from Leal and Baltischport. The Hapsal armed dispatch-boat brought General Dragonoff back up the bay, with a careworn face and wearied eyes.

Not a vessel was allowed to come in or out of the shallow and tortuous channel until the Imperial family were half way to Baltischport. The loyal citizens of Hapsal never saw again the faces of the Imperial pair whose heads were soon to be weightied with the heaviest crown on earth!

The fair princely children had already been spirited on board the "Polar Star," and only mountains of luggage and disconsolate courtiers remained to tell of the vanished glories of the Imperial visit. Pleasure's light mask was broken, and grim Fear peeped out from Folly's eyes!

There were anxious hearts on those Baltic shores as the sun slowly sunk to its rest. No vessel remained in the bay but the "Aslauga," anchored there off the quay, within easy pistol-shot of the doubled sentinels. A

hundred eyes wolfishly watched the luckless craft now!

In the sick room of Marie von Dornberg, with a happy heart, Olga Luboff gloated over the coming promotion of her lover.

She mused, "This will surely make him a General, and I shall soon be a proud and loving wife!"

For she saw in her dreams of the glorious future the great marble ball-room of the Winter Palace, and herself a bright, particular star.

So, waiting for her lover's secret messages with an assumed patience, she gravely bowed when Princess Zenaide ordered, "You are not to leave her rooms for an instant!"

Fear had quarantined the Lady of the Isles as if she was an unclean thing! In the great drawing-rooms Madame de Bellegarde and Excellence Dragonoff talked with hushed voices, for they, as well as the heart-broken mother, believed that Max von Dornberg had already fallen a victim to Fedor Lazareff's unerring aim. That Nadine Valdor, with the vanished Tatiana and the aged butler Elia, were perhaps solemnly guarding the corpse of the last of the von Dornbergs. And so, sorrow possessed all their hearts!

"Do not undeceive them," whispered General Dragonoff, as he drew the Circassian captive into his own room on his return. "If Max is to be saved, you and I alone must save him! Tell me all that you know. I love him as a son, for, poor boy, I fear he is but a victim, not a malefactor!" Too well, Dragonoff knew the game which was on hand now.

Princess Zenaide had, in her stern code, already formulated a grim punishment for the traitors who had dragged Max von Dornberg down. A wild access of her Border fury swept through her heart. "No one shall know," she swore in her heart. "I must trap this she-devil! Oh, God! To be alone with her, to have but one hour at Dornberg with Patkul and Tatiana there to help me! I must use this brave old soul to save Marie's birthright, and, I must blind him!" For she was musing over a summary Circassian method—a *way of her own*!

Ignorant herself of von Geist's schemes, she simply faltered, "I know nothing! What has happened? For

God's sake, let me go back to Dornberg! Leave the Countess here in safety! I will take the yacht, with Olga Luboff and our own people, and go back at once to Dornberg!

"Countess Marie will think that we are all happily together over there. The doctor says that it is brain fever! I only know that Max and Nadine are gone! As long as the Countess is here, you may be able to prevent a descent upon the island. *Do it!* For once the Russian flag flies there, the whole family will be degraded and their fortune confiscated!

"You can certify on honor that she is lying helpless here. Let the Police Colonel send the official army surgeons here to certify that she is demented!"

"You are a wise girl, and a true heart!" cried Dragonoff. "Should our fugitives come to the island you can hide them, or keep them away, or warn them off. My God! If they could but get over to Sweden or Denmark until I can unravel the plot and fix the villainy!"

He gazed out of the windows at the storm now rising and lashing the shallow waters into the wild fury of a Baltic tempest.

Princess Zenaide shuddered as she thought of the two fugitives now braving the inclement seas in a cockle-shell fisher-boat. "What has been discovered?" she questioned, with bated breath.

"Infamous!" cried Dragonoff. "The bathing pavilion of the Imperial children was prepared as a deadly trap to murder the two Grand Dukes, if not the innocent children! A dozen cans of the most dangerous explosives were found secreted, with electric wires leading to a house now in the hands of the police.

"And Gorski and others have traced up stolen visits of Max von Dornberg to this nest of the conspirators. He has been found to be implicated with others who have fled! Gorski has gathered abundant proofs! Already, by telegraph, gunboats have been ordered out from Abo, Hango, Helsingfors, and Reval!

"Every outgoing ship is to be stopped and searched, and the Baltischport and Leal dispatch-boats will cruise around until the friends of this young madman try to spirit him away. Every police station in Russia is at-

ready warned by telegraph! Max von Dornberg is even now a proscribed outlaw!

"There is but one course—the plea for pardon! My gray hairs will be humbled before the Czarewitch! Thank God!" cried Dragonoff, "Marie von Dornberg is still the Lady of the Isles! For the sovereignty is in her own blood, as a von Ehrenstein!"

"The whole story is a tissue of base lies!" cried Zenaide, with flashing eyes and heaving bosom. "His innocence shall yet be made clear! I only ask you to aid me. Get me away to Dornberg! Give me the yacht. It may save Countess Marie's life! Let the doctors give her sedatives, and one week—only one week I ask! Be my friend. Go and face Gorski with the Count de Bellegarde!"

In an hour, the old General returned, to find the Princess Zenaide calmly superintending the servants in their arrangements for her departure. "I have obtained the full permission! Bellegarde and I will put you on board at daybreak. I have ordered Intendant Alexei Patkul to come here at once for your orders! The tide serves for an instant departure after dawn!" And then, Princess Zenaide smiled a frozen smile.

"Then, give me a free hand!" she cried. "I will send the yacht back to you at once, to be at your disposal, so as to create no suspicion! Now let us dine as gayly as if nothing had happened but the sudden illness of our beloved one. Send Patkul, at once, to me here, when he comes!" And she was all ready for her voyage when the night fell.

In the old Count's study, Princess Zenaide sat alone long after the house was still. A cold smile wreathed her lips as she dismissed Olga Luboff to dream over the unexpected happiness of returning to the island, freed from all suspicion.

In her joy at the success of Gorski's plan she had forgotten the loss of the telltale scrawl which von Geist had pencilled when he had vainly tried to reach the absent Max von Dornberg.

"Ivan will come to me soon. He will be General Gorski soon, and then, his agents on the island can be our messengers of love!" triumphantly thought Olga Luboff, her heart singing with joy. The prize was *within her grasp at last!*

But long before the dawn, the tall Circassian beauty was pacing her lonely rooms as the summer daybreak came slowly on. She had watched the stars, and the magic amulet of carven turquoise wreathed her trembling fingers as she prayed to the Allah of the Adighé for an awful vengeance upon the wicked!

"Fool, he surely is! A vain boy, with a wild heart and wayward passions, but, an assassin, *never!*" She started when the servant summoned her, and then quickly hid in her bosom a long, heavy Circassian blade which she had stolen from the trophy-armory of the Count de Bellegarde.

And, throwing open the door, she calmly admitted the glittering-eyed Tatiana, who had stolen back into the château in the silence of the night. "*She sends you these!* Her life is joined with yours to save him!" whispered the girl, as she handed a packet of papers to the Princess.

"And, this token!" There was a ring whose matchless ruby glowed like a crimson fleck of blood. "I know the signal!" muttered Zenaide. "The rose of Love, the price of Crime, the sign of Death!"

It was in the foggy gray of dawn that the "Aslauga" glided out past the guard-boats. "We will surely catch him over there!" whispered Gorski to the delighted Olga. "My General's commission is already on its way from Petersburg. Katkoff telegraphed for it. And I will soon be with you, over there," he panted. "I shall leave in a week, with a full guard.

"He is hiding still on the main shore. Only one fishing-boat went down the bay since the secret orders, with an old woman and a half-witted boy named Olaf. Watch, trap him, and wait for me. Your reward is at hand!"

And then, he lifted his cap courteously to the stately Zenaide as she bade Patkul order the lines loosened, for the "Aslauga" had been warped up to the wharf. Olga Luboff, with streaming eyes, saw her lover's tall form fade from her sight.

The last that Colonel Ivan Gorski saw, as he strained his eyes, was the fluttering handkerchief of Olga Luboff, the sign of the doom of the von Dornbergs! And then, the two old nobles went sadly back to the house of sorrow

as the "Aslauga" beat out into the roughening sea, like a fierce ocean cormorant!

General Dragonoff watched the "Aslauga" glide away, and he turned with a groan of anguish as he saw Gorski hasten away to where the Ritter von Geist now awaited him at the head of the jetty, in the doors of the great masonry Douane and Guard Post.

"What the devil is this fellow up to?" growled Dragonoff. "Never mind, de Bellegarde and I have a claim to a hearing! Thank God, poor Marie is ignorant of all this! Her fever will make it but one sorrow when she wakes, not a succession of living deaths!"

He slowly drove homeward, satisfied that he had inspected the yacht closely. "Only those four peasant sailors and Patkul on board! These, with old Elia and Tatiana, are the personal household of the Countess. There is nothing to excite suspicion in the visit, nothing to incriminate, and I may be able to prevent an official seizure of the Countess Marie's sea-girt heritage!"

He was astonished at Princess Zenaide's calmness.

"Leave all to me, General! I will find out the truth! I shall prove his innocence, and you can take Nadine to plead to the lovely Dagmar!"

"Let her beg for the life of this hot-head! For in Max von Dornberg's veins runs no blood of the assassin!"

Her eyes shone out menacingly as she said, "Even a woman's hand can strike home! You must shield me now, for, *I go on a forlorn hope!*"

The old veteran had kissed her firm, white hands. "Take this," he whispered. "I have brought you ten thousand roubles, in paper. Should you be able to help Max with money, use it like water! Thank God, we can afford to be more than generous!" Then he faltered, "My duty to the Czar and to his noble son ties my hands. If you can save Max, fear not to act! I can cover all, but if he lingers a moment on the Baltic islands, he is doomed!"

"There are five gunboats closing down now to search the islands! Tell him, let him know, if you can reach him, that I will throw myself at the Czar's feet to save him!"

"What I shall do, *you must never know,*" solemnly answered the princely captive. "But, I come from a

race of warrior kings, and I shall not spare the guilty! The secrets of the stars are mine!"

Around her neck gleamed the mystic amulet of carven turquoises, and her hands were pressed upon her bosom, where she felt the Daghestan dagger resting upon her throbbing heart. There was a sinister smile upon her carven lips!

General Prince Nicolas Katkoff was seething in a tumult of passionate apprehension when a breathless courier delivered to him a letter sealed with Arline Pulawy's crest, as the "Polar Star's" great double-banked barge swept away from the landing. There was no time for an answer, and his face darkened as he read, "I have gone back to Reval to await you on your return with the Czarewitch. I will wait there for one promise from your lips! I have asked nothing from you before now, but if this prayer be denied, I leave Russia for ever! You shall never look upon my face again!"

"We shall see, my lady!" growled Katkoff, as he was borne on the sparkling waves to the yacht which was soon to deliver its princely freight at the doors of the Winter Palace on the Neva.

"Thank God!" he sighed, "my life here is a guarantee of my faith!" And he recalled his stern orders to Colonel Gorski to hunt Max von Dornberg to the death. Only the new General to be, and the Ritter von Geist knew the dark secrets of the Bathing Pavilion's ingenious apparatus of murder.

But, General Gorski was aware that the Master of Weissenstein was the secret vicegerent of the pitiless Governor-General. In their hearts, the two masters of Hapsal cursed the untoward flight of von Dornberg. "Who could have warned the fools at the old Schloss?" demanded Gorski. "We have caught no one but von Dornberg in our net."

The Ritter grimly eyed the disappearing yacht as he slowly said: "Can it be that Max really is a coward, and fled to avoid fighting Lazareff?"

And then, General Gorski smiled and lit a cigarette.

"His capture is a matter only of days, for our lines are closing in. Every agent, police and military, is now warned.

"After his trial, the Executioner can twist the truth out of his throat. You can see him alone in his cell. I have easily earned my promotion, and you will succeed Katkoff as Governor-General when the official inquiry is over. Katkoff will be sent to some higher command, and the Third Section's men will clean up the wreck. Look out for yourself!"

It was an ominous warning, but von Geist laughed: "I shed wine, not blood. Wine is my only tribute to fate.

"Bah! I am held in the background, Gorski. For ten years, I have mingled as a foreign nobleman with the wildest reactionaries of Switzerland, Poland, Germany, France, and Belgium. I only work from above, and all our reports are modelled on the foreign spy system of Germany.

"Every name is entered in cabalistic characters or in numbers. I have spent a fortune to enter Continental society from the status of an Austrian resident, under the guise of the dilettante and antiquarian student."

"This woman now at Weissenstein?" anxiously said General Gorski.

"She is a reckless light-o'-love. Wine, chiffons, pleasure, dress, and jewels are her pay. Men are her playthings and her own beauty, her only capital. Katkoff may murmur a few specious lies in her ear. As for me, she knows nothing save that I have an open hand! And many more of Lais's children and Phryne's nymphs know that!"

And, as the "Aslauga" followed the "Polar Star" to sea in a pelting rain-storm, driving recklessly through the lonely forest toward Kegel, Arline Pulawy read once more the letter which had called her to instant action.

"I dare not keep this a moment longer!" she sighed. "And who has ventured to trust me with the tidings of the springing of the trap?" She was without a single true friend in the world!

Casimir Pulawy was back at Weissenstein, in charge of the pleasure-haunt of Prince Katkoff. And, for gold, even he might betray his own blood.

She read once more the lines which were to be von Geist's undoing.

It was clearly a woman's hand which had traced them. "There is love lingering in every word," she murmured. "It is woman's softest art, her burden of pain, her crown and her reef of soul-wreckage, this fevered, stained, maddening delirium of Love, with burning Passion as its flame, and sad-eyed Memory guarding its cold ashes! Yes, a woman who loves surely wrote this!

"If you would save the man whom you love, know, then, that von Geist has betrayed him to his death!

"You can atone for breaking a young girl's heart by saving Max! Katkoff is your slave! Von Dornberg is now a fugitive, and you may only be able to reach him later, in the prison-cell, should he be taken. And I would gladly hail you as a sister, if you pay back the forfeit of a stolen love, by saving the life of von Geist's poor dupe!"

"*Blood for blood!*" Arline Pulawy slowly swore in her heart. "For every sob of this mother's heart, a drop of von Geist's heart's blood! I will wait! There is a way. If I tell Katkoff that his friend, my host, has been mad enough to brutalize me, then Max will be avenged! But, I will bide my time.

"Ah, my God! it may not save him!" she cried, in a storm of tears, as she leaned out of her britska to cry: "Faster! Faster!

"I must be there—there, at Reval!

"If I have Katkoff at my side, von Geist shall meet more than his match!" For already, she saw the Governor, with his tiger eyes, kneeling at her feet.

The storm wildly raged in the open channel, where the "Polar Star" bore far away to the north, to double Spint Head.

The sails of the royal yacht were close-reefed, and the long black column of smoke streamed westward, a dark, menacing shadow, borne toward the deserted Island Kingdom.

Her decks were deserted by all save the hardy sailors as she pitched in the long, rolling seas, showing her gleaming copper high out of water.

From the swaying deck of the "Aslauga," the eagle-eyed Circassian watched the smoke of a coast-guard steamer crossing the "Polar Star's" bows, and running directly over to the doomed island of Worms.

Clinging to the mizzen shrouds, Princess Zenaide, with Patkul at her side, gazed through her binocular glasses at the Hapsal police-steamer, rolling heavily, as she lay directly in the yacht's path, hove-to in the chop-ping sea.

"Are we far enough out to clear the southern point, Alexei?" said the captive Princess.

The island's keeper gazed at the surf-lashed shore to the south. "In ten minutes, we can clear it with one more long tack."

"Then, Alexei," the bright-eyed woman cried, "when I tell you to port your helm, send the four sailors forward for their dinner. I have told Elia what to do. Tatiana is in the cabin with Olga. She will take the helm when you and I go below. And now, you tell me that you can show yourself a man?"

The burly islander bowed his head. "You will take care of Tatiana?" he hoarsely murmured.

"She shall have a Barina's dowry! I swear it by the stars I worship, by Mohammed's grave hung between heaven and earth!"

"Listen!" she sharply said.

The yacht plunged along in sullen sweeps over the white-crested waves, throwing the spray high in air as she drove into the long rollers of the shallow sound. "The gunboat cannot overtake us in an hour if we run down the sound?" anxiously questioned the woman, whose cheeks were ashen pale.

"We could lead her into Riga," stolidly said Patkul.

"When we are ten miles away from that gunboat," cried Zenaide, "when she is hull down, then, *come down into the cabin!* And when you call me, I will send Elia and Tatiana up on deck. Elia is to keep all the men forward! Our work on deck will only take us a moment." And, drawing him toward her, she whispered her last orders.

As the Circassian turned and staggered to the companion-way, her eyes seemed to blaze as if they were blue, lambent corpse-candles.

Stout Alexei Patkul crossed himself. "It is the will of God!" he said, devoutly. And then, he drew from his breast a silver medal blessed before the miraculous image of Our Lady of Kazan.

"For the Barina's sake!" he gasped, and his lips moved in a mumbling prayer. The islander's stout hands were busied with unloosing a couple of fathoms of light chain which bound the heavy kedg-anchor at the stern to the shackles.

With nervous hands he lightly lashed the anchor with a few turns of a loose sheet. "I can cut that—when the time comes!" he mournfully muttered, and, still mumbling his prayers, watched the point to the south fading away behind them. There seemed to be the wail of Death now in the shrieking winds!

Seated, with her head resting on her hands, in the little cabin of the "Aslauga," the Circassian Princess silently watched Tatiana's rosy face paling as the yacht leaned over under the blasts of the rising storm.

The hissing brine tore by them, scouring the vessel's quarters with a surging, rasping violence.

And at the other side of the table, Olga Luboff sat, her hands grasping the arms of a heavy revolving chair, which was firmly screwed to the floor.

Her dark, loosened hair fell over her heavy features, and her furtive, coal-black eyes avoided the questioning glances of Zenaide's eyes. A grim silence reigned in the stifling cabin.

Never a word as to the strange disappearance of Max and Nadine had crossed the lips of the artful woman companion, now actively on her guard. "They never shall know from me!" she pondered, as her heavy eyes closed in the dull stupor of the nausea which was overcoming her. But she was watching, cat-like, her secret enemy.

With wonderment, she saw the resolute Princess affecting to write, as she turned over a portfolio drawn from the rack at her side.

And then, the sly Olga closed her eyes, in the cool self-protection of the Russian social spy still on watch. Her brain was dazzled with the golden future now opening to her as Madame la Générale Gorski. They were delicious dreams, these rosy dreams of Love.

The plunges of the stanch yacht dismayed her not, for well she knew the amphibious nature of the hardy Oestlanders on deck.

And she lazily watched Alexei Patkul, too, from a

corner of her eyes, as he clambered down the steps, bringing a gust of cooling, fog-drenched air in with him.

Once she had fancied this brave, peasant-born fellow. She—the woman soon to be Madame la Générale! She closed her eyes in a delicious triumph.

“For the men,” he respectfully said, as he reached for a couple of bottles of vodka.

“It will be a rough voyage,” he said, as he closed the closet-door. “It is nearly time to put the boat about.” And he gazed earnestly at the silent Circassian girl writing there.

Princess Zenaide fixed her eyes warningly upon him. “Let Elia surely see that the sailors do not tippie too much. Tatiana, you can go forward and have your own meal now,” quietly concluded Zenaide.

And then, standing at the foot of the ladder, she gave to Patkul the signal, which he awaited, with a silent flash of her dauntless eyes. The helm was put hard up, and the sails rattled wildly for a few seconds.

In a moment, the graceful boat swept around and then stood away on the port tack. All was silent now, save the screams of the sea-mews and the whistling of the wild winds through the tensely drawn rigging.

Alexei Patkul clambered back, and, seated at the table at Princess Zenaide’s side, drew a rough sketch of the manœuvre which was to land them at Dornberg by one more tack to starboard.

In ten minutes, he arose and took down a heavy woollen sea-muffler from its hook, and then, standing behind Olga Luboff’s chair, he sought to read Princess Zenaide’s inscrutable face with imploring eyes.

“*Nozv!*” cried the Circassian, leaping forward like a tiger-cat, as the stalwart Patkul quickly bound the scarf tightly around the neck of the cruel-hearted woman trapped to her death. Olga Luboff’s staring eyes read her merciless doom in the stony faces bent over her!

She struggled violently to rise, but in an instant Patkul had lashed both her arms to the chair, and then passed the stout spun-yarn coil around her waist.

There was an abject entreaty in the eyes of the poor wretch, who felt the sharp point of Zenaide’s dagger

at her breast. For the Circassian was now an avenging fury. The tables were turned! "You have betrayed Max!" the Tcherkess girl hissed.

"Write!" sternly cried Zenaide, as she bade Patkul loosen the woman's right arm. "The story of how the explosives were stored away in the Bathing Pavilion. The villainy of Gorski and von Geist. Quick! or I will bury the blade in your heart! There is no one near us now to hear your screams!"

And only the sullen waters dashing by answered Olga Luboff's muffled shrieks for aid. But Patkul's strong hand was on her throat!

"Quick! or I will strike!" the Tcherkess maiden said, her hand raised high in air; and then, with a trembling hand, the trapped spy scrawled the story of her shame.

"Go on! *Finish!*" urged Zenaide, as she saw the dozen lines going slowly on down the sheet. The narrative told of the hiding of the dynamite by Olga Luboff herself; of the luring of the innocent von Dornberg to the conferences with von Geist, at night, on the platform of the Bathing Pavilion; of the wires artfully led in, by Gorski's orders; and of her own deadly work in snaring von Dornberg at the instance of Lazareff, Gorski, and von Geist. She was mutely battling for her wretched life now!

"Write that he is innocent! That the plan is to gain the island of Worms by foul means!" said Zenaide, with flaming eyes. "And write, too, that von Geist is a police spy! Write how you trapped Max with the letter, to be lured, innocent, to his doom!"

There were sobs from Alexei Patkul's rugged heart as Zenaide sternly commanded, "*Sign!*" A hollow groan echoed beneath the muffler as the Circassian held up the fatal scrawl, which Olga had dropped upon the ballroom floor. And the trembling fingers obeyed her.

The last stroke was over, the name "Olga Luboff" traced, and below it the last word began to appear: "Mer——"

And, as the trembling fingers relaxed, the Daghestan dagger was buried deep to its hilt in the bosom of the woman who went to her death to gain Ivan Gorski's love!

"*Quick, now!*" screamed Zenaide. "Send Tatiana to the forecastle! Lash the wheel!"

The bewildered islander sprang up the stair as Zenaide gazed unpitifully at the distorted face of the dead woman, for the heavy Tcherkess dagger had struck home!

In a few moments the islander was at her side. And then, with his strong arms, he dragged the body out upon the deck.

Zenaide stood, holding the wheel, as the gay songs of the sailors drifted back from the forecastle, where old Elia stood on guard, gazing down at Tatiana's rude woovers.

Patkul cut the rope lashings of the kedge-anchor with a few strokes of his knife.

He bent over the body, knotting the light chain around it, and then, with a shudder, he rolled the corpse over the vessel's quarter, and seizing a hand-spike, he tilted the anchor over the rail.

It sank with a sullen plunge. "It is done! Go below!" he cried.

And, as the cabin-door closed, he loudly yelled: "*Man overboard!*"

For five minutes the half-drunken sailors, with Elia and the astounded Tatiana, gazed backward in the foaming wake.

"*She never rose!*" sobbed Patkul.

BOOK III.

RANSOMED BY LOVE.

CHAPTER XI.

A THWARTED PLOT.

It was half an hour before the "Aslauga," cruising around, had fruitlessly crossed the scene of the supposed disaster. The freshening wind now rose almost to a gale.

The hardy boatswain at the wheel growled to Alexei Patkul: "We must bear away on our course. It is the will of God! The poor Barina must have struck heavily in falling overboard. There is not a sign of her!" And grimly Patkul stood there, answering never a word.

At the cabin hatch, with stony eyes, Princess Zenaide listened to the Intendant's warning. "We will soon be blown on a lee-shore here, unless we run down between Worms and Dago, and go about on the starboard tack, so as to fetch the west shore of our island. We can then stand off and on, and fire our signal guns. Our people will come out and take us off in a surf-boat. It will be a fearful night!"

"Do as you wish!" sternly cried the Circassian. "Send Elia down here, and, with Tatiana, I will then have all the help I need. You must not leave the deck for a single moment until the storm abates!"

As she spoke, she cast overboard the muffler which had drowned the cries of the unfortunate wretch who had died by the Daghestan blade, now lying in the ooze at the bottom of the sound.

"Come down and get your storm-clothes," calmly commanded Zenaide.

The sturdy Intendant shivered as he groped around the cabin. "She is a born witch!" he gasped; for not a sign of a struggle, not even a tell-tale spot of blood, was left to arouse suspicion.

And his eyes silently met those of the avenger as he hastened out of the haunted place.

When Tatiana began to mourn, in her dull, peasant fashion, the impassive Tcherkess called Elia to her side. "Bid her cease this childish folly! You must take her forward and turn the sailors out on deck if she plays the fool. I will have to send the yacht back to report this accident to General Dragonoff, and she and the sailors may be called as witnesses!"

With a single frightened glance at her silent mistress, Tatiana resumed her duties, under the sage counsels of the old servitor, whose faded eyes dumbly implored news of the beloved young master. But the lonely Circassian only gazed out vacantly on the darkened waste of waters.

Princess Zenaide, wrapped in a great storm-cloak, scanned the heaving gray mass of waves, their white crests now fiercely blown southward by the northeast gale.

"My God!" she murmured, as she fingered the sacred necklace. "They are drifting out there, on these wild waves, a prey perhaps to hunger! To be drowned like dogs, or else to be dragged back to a Russian prison! It is horrible, horrible! And now, what can I do?"

"Dragonoff must come over to me, for I dare not trust myself on Hapsal's shores until I know the fate of Nadine and the unhappy Max. If they try to reach any of our islands, they are only drifting into the jaws of Death!"

In vain she urged Patkul to crowd on all sail and round the strait between Dago and Worms before the darkness came. "I cannot blow the sticks out of her!" he sullenly said, with a fond glance at Tatiana.

The blunt islander doffed his cap. "Barina," he said, "go below and sleep! Leave men's work to men alone! It will be to-morrow noon before we can dare to run in on our western shore, and I will then land you all safely. I know my duty. Any more sail, and the sticks would be out of the 'Aslauga;' then we *would* go like she went, to a horrible death!"

He gloomily pointed to the blackened depths of the sea, beneath which the kedge-anchor weighted down the corpse of the woman who had died to make her burly lover a General.

Without a pang of remorse, the fatalist Princess dismissed Olga Luboff forever from her mind. It was of the two fugitives daring together the storm-lashed Baltic that she anxiously thought as she lay there, with staring eyes, on the couch reserved in the cabin for the Lady of the Isles.

Tatiana, at the table, stolidly finished the meal prepared by the old steward, and yet she shuddered as the graceful yacht leaped along over the long, swinging rollers. She was paralyzed with fear.

The sun was hidden behind the fog-wrack driving offshore, and a gloomy silence reigned in the cabin, until, at last, Princess Zenaide slept heavily, to dream of her native hills far away over the burning plains of the Ukraine. In her strong soul were no vain regrets.

With the stolid acceptance of Fate of the peasant-born Russian, Alexei Patkul drove his sobered sailors back to their duties, and then eyed the twinkling lights on each craggy point as the fleet schooner dashed along through the channel, racing out into the open Baltic.

It was a gray, angry morning light which greeted Princess Zenaide's eyes as she struggled upon the deck, where Alexei Patkul lay prone under the lee of the cabin house, his elbow neatly stayed with a couple of half-hitches of a handy rope.

Sleeping on an old sail, the bearded Russian was watched by the man at the wheel, who stirred his master with a heavy foot cased in a sea-boot, as the Princess clung to the companion-way irons. They were safe, at any rate. A glance showed that.

When Patkul rubbed his great shock of hempen hair, he dimly recalled the tragedy of the day before and crossed himself.

"In two hours, Barina, I will land you there, in the cove where our little fishing-village lies."

They were beating back toward the island of Worms, and, with her binoculars, Princess Zenaide could just catch a faraway, faint white gleam on the pure-clad ridge, where the deserted halls of Dornberg lay.

Suddenly she screamed: "A boat! A boat! Making for the cove! See! See, Alexei!" The Intendant calmly dropped the glass, after a few moments' study.

"One of the Hapsal fishing-cutters, driven out by the storm, and making for our island as a refuge."

And then came back to Zenaide, as her blood surged away from her heart, the agonized warning of General Dragonoff.

"Fools! Fools!" she cried. "Better tempt the fathomless waters! Better self-destruction, than the horrible hell of a Russian prison, or the clutch of the hangman's strangling fingers in the casemates of the Polygon!"

The unmoved Alexei gazed upon the distorted face. "She is surely going mad!" he muttered. "It is the curse of blood come upon her!" And then he drew out his treasured holy medal and kissed the painted faces gleaming through the encrusted silver.

But the Tcherkess Princess grasped his arm. "Bear up for that boat! There is life and death in our coming! Life to one who is innocent! Death to Marie von Dornberg if we fail! For Max, the young master, is in that boat!"

"She has gone stark crazy!" growled Patkul, as he gave his orders to the sailors, and, springing to the wheel, strained, with the astonished steersman, to bring the yacht on her altered course.

"It will be a long half an hour before we can come up with her," he sullenly said, as he descended the ladder and took a deep draught of vodki.

"Look well to the Barina, Tatiana!" he cried. "The accident to the Barina Olga has touched her mind!" And he significantly tapped his own broad, thickened forehead, as he stumped away to join the sailors over their tea and "goulash" in the forecabin.

He left old Elia, with a frightened face, whispering with the eager Princess.

But, for all his grumbling, Alexei Patkul was at Princess Zenaide's side as the yacht neared the fisher-boat, sweeping along with a rag of jib and a half-reefed mainsail.

But a mile now separated the two, and the group at the stern of the "Aslauga" were silent as Zenaide stood

waving a white signal. "Run up our flag! Quick! Quick!" she cried. "The von Dornberg flag, at the mizzen peak!"

And she laughed wildly as a waving signal answered the friendly manœuvre.

In ten minutes, the fisher-boat drifted safely under the lee of the "Aslauga," as she came up with the wind, and a coil of rope whizzed through the air. The cutter swung slowly under the yacht's quarter, and then Zenaide, leaning forward, with a wild cry threw up her arms.

"My God! He is gone! Gone!"

There was a bundle of wet rags lying in the bottom of the boat, and two stout sailors, with blanched faces, strained their brawny arms as they lifted the insensible form of Nadine Valdor over the boat's gunwale.

The girl's cold face was grimed with the sea-spray, and under the frieze-cloak of the old fisherwoman the draggled finery of the ball-dress, shining out, mocked the misery of the unhappy girl's plight.

The "Aslauga" drifted a half-mile off her course, while, in the cabin, the exhausted girl was plied with every restorative.

Tatiana and Elia, on their knees, were chafing her frozen limbs, as Patkul and Princess Zenaide forced the cognac between her pallid lips.

On the deck Olaf, the fisher lad, lay rubbing his benumbed hands and watching his boat dragged on in the wake of the drifting schooner.

When he had found his voice, after the fiery vodki had warmed him into life, he answered Princess Zenaide, who was bending over him.

"The other—the other one!" she cried, in a despairing wail.

"Safe," the boy doggedly said, "on board the brig 'Gustavus Vasa,' of Stockholm, bound from Reval to Aberdeen, with a cargo of hides and timber."

As Zenaide clasped her hands over her bosom in a frantic delight, the comely face of Tatiana appeared at the cabin door, crying, in her sudden access of joy:

"She is coming around, Barina! Hasten!" And when Zenaide knelt beside her beloved comrade of the Catherine Institute there was a gleam of intelligence

in the wandering eyes, a murmur of the lips, and a pleading motion of the fluttering fingers.

The Circassian's eyes were filled with scalding tears as Nadine whispered "*Safe! Safe!*" and then fell back, fainting, with a shuddering sigh.

Two hours later, the fishing-cutter landed the party in the little cove where the Countess Marie von Dornberg had gazed out at the setting sun.

There was an eager crowd of the islanders at hand, and a dozen strong arms bore Nadine Valdor to the crest, where the carriage was already awaiting the arrival of the happy merry-makers from the ball.

On the turret of the Château Dornberg, the three crowns and falcon gleamed upon the old flag bravely streaming out to the west. It was a sad home-coming.

The Princess Zenaide lingered at the strand and called the fisher-boy Olaf aside.

"Take any two of the villagers here. They will soon refit your boat. Cruise around for a week, fishing, run over to Arensburg, and then go back to Hapsal. I will reward the islanders when they return here. This five hundred roubles will buy you a boat, and nets, and a cottage. Remember, Olaf, you have never seen me, the Barina, nor the young Master! Can you forget?"

The fisher-boy, in one stroke, was thus enriched for years.

"For my whole life!" he cried, kneeling on the wet sands and kissing the strong white hand which had driven the Daghestan dagger deep into the heart of the woman, the story of whose untimely death "by falling overboard" was now the villagers' common property.

"Patkul," grimly said Princess Zenaide, "I need you at my side every moment, every instant, now!"

"Let the boatswain take the yacht over to Hapsal, and tell him to go to General Dragonoff and simply tell him the plain story of this poor woman's drowning. Give him fifty roubles, and bid him come back to me with news of the Countess. I will write nothing. The General will understand why!"

When the lights burned low in Nadine Valdor's chamber at the Château Dornberg, the Princess Zenaide came down to the great hall, where a wood-fire was blazing,

and the storm raged without. Alexei Patkul stood there awaiting her. He was as sturdy as a forest oak, as stanch and true.

"I have posted our best people on watch at both landings. I have four extra armed men sleeping here, to await my orders. And Elia will sleep on a couch before your door. The yacht has already rounded the island, thank God, and will be safe inside the sound before midnight, for the storm is rising again. It will be a terrible sea to fight, all the way down past Wisby. The fisher-boat is already gone!"

The tall Circassian, robed in a white gown, with the blue turquoises gleaming on her swan-like neck, stood alone before the fire as the wild gusts rattled the casements. She lifted a warning finger, as the flames threw a red glare on her heaving bosom.

"Remember, you have seen nothing, Alexei!"

"I shall see *her*—all my life!" sobbed the frightened Intendant, falling on his knees and kissing the hem of her gown. He was a simple, ignorant peasant, but loyal and true.

"But I will die for you and the young Master! The knout could not tear it from my soul!"

He went away, leaving her there, with her white arm raised in a proud challenge to fate, that lonely woman who battled to save the hearth and home of Marie von Dornberg. The untamed child of a strange and fearless race.

"I wronged Countess Marie," mused the Princess Zenaide. "Some day, perhaps, I shall know all. For this vile wretch who tried to trap the son has also betrayed the mother. He has schemed for long years to make himself the Lord of the Isles. Some day I shall know. For she, too, was led along a hidden path! The dog should die!"

And on the next night, while Zenaide whispered to her friend secrets which even the devoted Nadine feared to hide in her heart, a dozen grim Russian police made merry in the cabin of the "Aslauga" at Hapsal anchorage. There was a new mystery to solve now.

General Dragonoff was bidden to accompany the new-fledged dignitary Gorski on an official tour to the island château. For the drowning of Olga Luboff seemed more

than fortuitous to the startled schemers who sought Max's life.

But, while Marie von Dornberg wailed in her delirium, calling for her son, and Nadine tremblingly told to Zenaide the story of how the disguised Count had been smuggled on the friendly Swedish hide-drogher, an inbound steamer of the Finnish Navigation Company was towing the dismasted hulk of the "*Gustavus Vasa*" into Reval harbor. The raging ocean had made the stout vessel only a floating wreck!

As the lights gleamed out from the long mole, armed with its black, bristling cannon, and the steamer glided on into the quiet bay between a line of anchored war-vessels bearing the blue-and-white cross of Russia, Max von Dornberg clutched his concealed pistol and cried, in the anguish of his heart: "Back into the jaws of death! If I could only first send a ball crashing through his heart—that traitorous dog!—then, the next shot would send me to the land of freedom, out of the power of the Czar!"

When the heavily rolling hulk was dragged into the calm basin behind the outspread jetties, and a tug dragged her away into a smooth pool, he heard the anchor roughly rattle down. Its sound was as grating as the fall of the first clods upon a coffin.

"Alone, friendless, without money, papers, or even a name, here, in the enemy's stronghold, I have no place to lay my head; and the veriest scullion in the cook's galley may betray me to the gallows!" A girl's white face rose up to cheer him. "*Nadine!*" he murmured. "God be with thee, brave darling!"

The official voyage of General Aide-de-Camp Michel Dragonoff to Dornberg, with the pompous General Ivan Gorski, was an exhibition of true Russian fraternal duplicity.

Loyal old Michel Dragonoff, conscious of being watched, was keenly on his guard. The sending of the rude boatswain and his three sailors over to face the natural inquiries of the Esthonian police had given to the old General his needed cue. There was not even a line of written statement to be twisted and distorted by the Procurateur-General, now deep in the mysteries of the infernal machines of the Bathing Pavilion. For the secret police sought for a bloody vengeance now.

It was left to General Ivan Gorski alone to mourn over the death of the unfortunate Olga Luboff, and yet, with a due sense of the social importance of the Dragonoff and de Bellegarde connection, as well as the von Dornberg fortune, the Police-General fawned upon the old hero of Shipka Pass, as the "Livadia" swept along, *à grande vitesse*, toward the island. But the wary Dragonoff was armed at all points.

The summer seas were smooth again, and gayly the two dignitaries lunched upon the best of the Hapsal market's dainties, topped off with champagne, cognac, and the cigars of the incomparable Upman, the "Imperiales," so dear to your loyal Muscovite.

Michel Dragonoff affected a breezy cheerfulness which was now foreign to his heart. For the fate of Nadine and Max was a silent torture to the brave soldier. He had succeeded in wheeling Biren de Bellegarde into line.

"Simply ignore the whole thing," he said. "Let no one see the Countess von Dornberg. Keep Prince Lazareff out of your house. If Marie recovers her mind, should the fever leave her, simply say that Max has taken a run over to the Continent until the ugly quarrel with Lazareff blows over. I have silenced that young brute's bragging tongue.

"It is time enough for us to unite the three families in one appeal for clemency to the Czar and the Czarewitch when Max is taken. Should he escape, let us all keep a sacred silence. Countess von Dornberg cannot be dragooned out of her inheritance!

"Especially preserve a judicious avoidance of this mysterious fellow, the Ritter von Geist. He is all too thick with Lazareff and Gorski. Keep the Weissenstein magnate now at arm's length. Drive with him, go out to public occasions with him, and yet, avoid all *tête-à-têtes*. If you can deceive him with our apparent carelessness, the play will soon play itself out. But it will demand all our skill, nerve, and courage."

It was indeed so. In the hour before the "Livadia" sailed, von Geist and the parvenu General Gorski conferred in the guarded stronghold at the head of the quay.

An acute, cunning, bullet-headed little Russian, Ivan

Gorski soon began to see that he had already reaped all the rewards of the victory. Burning with all the social ambitions of the upstart, he already saw himself at court, a favorite, a man of mark.

There was nothing more to gain from the Hapsal episode but, a glittering promotion already being within his reach, to tantalize the man who had "arrived" by the hideous self-sacrifice of the stormy-hearted woman who had adored his herculean physical splendor.

"The Governor-Generalship!" Gorski's heart beat high.

There was already talk of the signal promotion of General Prince Katkoff, and but one dark horse seemed to be left in the field. And so, Ivan Gorski hoodwinked and deceived the mysteriously powerful Ritter von Geist.

In their last colloquy, Gorski gravely urged the Ritter to connect the various Chapters of the Brotherhood of the East with the thwarted crime of the Bathing Pavilion. So far they were scatheless.

"Your personal evidence alone will convict Max von Dornberg now," he said, warningly. "Olga Luboff's death removes our 'star witness,' and von Dornberg's sly companions are all under cover! I relied on your manœuvres to trap the whole Hapsal nest, red-handed! But, they seem to have escaped you!"

"You go back to Reval to confer with Prince Katkoff?" anxiously questioned von Geist.

"I go wherever my duty calls me!" proudly replied Gorski, complacently admiring his new General's uniform with an added medal or two. He was far up the Ladder of Life now.

"I will be the first at Katkoff's side!" vowed Ritter von Geist, as he saw General Gorski clank away down the quay. "I made but one mistake! Each Chapter is ignorant of the local passwords of the others!"

"I can only call the heads of Chapters together, and they are all really ignorant of the pretended design to destroy the two Romanoff Grand Dukes and the children in the direct line of succession!"

"If I appear publicly, as a witness, should Max be taken, there are a hundred assassins ready to execute a vengeance upon me!"

"I must work only through Katkoff, and I will be on the ground as soon as Gorski. Arline and Casimir will surely be there! Through the pretty jade, I can easily search Katkoff's heart! I will shed wine, jewels, and money in this cause, but no blood! Violence is the weapon of the fool!"

The telegraph officials smiled as they busied the wires with the last cipher dispatches of von Geist and Gorski. *Mon cher collague* was diligently undermining his enemy with the fierce-eyed potentate who was now a mere suppliant in Beauty's court, for Arline Pulawy was safely ensconced once more in her "coign of vantage" on the Katherinethal.

General Michel Dragonoff had privately warned the de Bellegardes and his own wife, and directed a policy of absolute silence as to the disappearance of the two young patricians.

Hapsal had settled down at last into the watchful suspicious guilt of the Russian city when the charged cloud of trouble hovers over it, the lambent spark still hid in the bosoms of the pitiless police.

On the deck of the "Livadia," the watchful official convives eyed each other with a catlike distrust.

They were pushing each other off with friendly taps, even as the eagle-eyed wrestlers caress each other with fatal fondling before the death grapple.

General Gorski was astonished that Dragonoff made no mention of the glistening muskets of the sentinels on the impounded "Aslauga."

But, serene in the personal confidence of the Czar and his heir, Michel Dragonoff trusted to the mute appeal of his Shipka Pass wounds, even as the old soldiers of the Tenth Legion won over Cæsar by showing him their hacked bodies and those toothless gums!

"I will wait until I have something to ask for," mused Dragonoff. "Then I will bare my scarred breast! Countess Marie shall plead her still sovereign rights, Nadine Valdor shall recall a father's gallant soldier-martyrdom, and that mysterious captive, the dauntless Zenaide, will proudly ask, 'Where is my childhood's realm, the birthright of the brave?'"

And, but too well, the old aide-de-camp of the Czar knew that the greedy Gorski had no proofs beyond Count Max's evasion.

If he had, there would have been a guard-post in the Parc de Bellegarde long before now, and a battalion encamped in the long-coveted Island Kingdom!

"What do you advise, my dear colleague?" craftily began Gorski, as the "Livadia" spun along over the oily waters of the sound.

Already the watchful Patkul had reported to the Princess Zenaïde the coming of the Baltischport police guard-boat. And the Tcherkess girl was ready, armed at all points!

"I have *nothing* to advise, my dear General," warily answered Dragonoff. "You are charged with some official duty? I only take orders from the Czar himself or the Grand Duke Heritier in person, save when Prince Katkoff transmits their august wishes! I certainly am greatly concerned at Count von Dornberg's social rivalry with Lazareff.

"These young hot-heads are the bane of Russian society! As to the disappearance of the young couple—it may be love, or only a woman's fond solicitude for a friend's life.

"I was in the ballroom, with my family party, when von Dornberg left to escort his mother back to the Château Bellegarde!

"He never returned, as far as I know, and two young people, in *toilette de bal*, and *grande tenue*, cannot long be hidden!"

Dragonoff was conscious that Gorski was keenly watching him, and so he toyed with his turquoise rings and evenly knocked off the white ash of his Havana. There was a dreaming silence as the quay of Dornberg came into sight.

"I have had my own *beaux jours*," began Dragonoff, anxious to develop Gorski's real plans. "I'm told that one of these svelte, languorous, witching Polish beauties has been visiting at Weissenstein, à l'improviste!"

"*Au jeune homme, chaque femme est reine!*" laughed Dragonoff. "This mad boy has had no previous experience of our fiery-hearted beauties! The stolid, blue-eyed German *fräuleins* are mere Dresden dolls! Your Parisienne is but an automatic love-machine, operated by the gold poured into her outstretched hands! Daughters of the horse-leech, crying 'Give! Give!'"

"Now, Dornberg certainly could aspire to *les bonnes fortunes* in the absence of Prince Katkoff and the Ritter von Geist! One represents power and place, the other wealth and luxury.

"But, these mature lovers must cede the *pas* to a brilliant young Berserker like Max. He has already made one stolen excursion to Weissenstein! He may be there even now, and you may yet be laughed out of the country! As for his connection with our treasonable designs, remember the family motto, '*Loyal en tout!*' For a hundred years they have been blameless!"

"The strange death of this poor woman Luboff demands a very close investigation!" morosely said Gorski.

And then, Dragonoff looked him squarely in the eyes. "*Explain yourself*, General," he gravely said. "Remember that my brother died to save Princess Zenaïde's life! The Czar has succeeded by the sword to that gallant girl's splendid patrimony!"

"Because a yacht careens and a sea-sick girl falls overboard, will you invade the sovereign rights of the Countess of Dornberg? The Princess Zenaïde is under my protection, and she is a guest of the Lady of the Isles. She is the ward, in durance, of the Russian Crown!"

"I have observed that men like you, burdened with your unpleasant duties, begin to look at all of life at last through the peep-holes of the Third Section!" His voice was icy in its sneering scorn.

The thrust went home. General Gorski recalled his recently formed plan to thwart Prince Lazareff's pretensions to Nadine Valdor's hand. "Von Dornberg is a fugitive, and Lazareff must be side-tracked," he mused.

"If I can placate these people—this proud line of friends and kinsmen—I may yet gild my promotion with the young heiress's fortune! They may be glad to accept me for safety, and then, after a season at court, I may be made the Governor-General! With the old Oestland nobles at my back, I could rule the 'frontierland' in quiet!" It was a brilliant programme.

He knew not of Katkoff's vast design to break down the whole Hanseatic privileges and to sweep in the last outlying autonomy on the Baltic; he ignored, too, the

secret compact which would send Katkoff to rule the Castle Perilous of Poland and to give the Baltic Provinces to Ritter von Geist.

And so, he blandly answered, "I rely on you, my dear General, to at once inform the Princess Zenaide that I only come as an official guest. I shall not land even one soldier—not a gendarme—for I have been charged to respect the flag of the three crowns and the white falcon! I look only to you to aid me in obtaining the Princess Zenaide's voluntary *procès-verbal* of this most untoward accident!" But, in his heart he thirsted for the ruin of the woman whom he flattered.

"That is wise, Gorski," said the mollified veteran. "For Madame la Comtesse von Dornberg is at Hapsal to answer for herself. You'll find the young fellow is only mixed up in some foolish love intrigue, or else he may be waiting to meet Lazareff in some remote place for the duel!

"Lazareff is a liar and braggart, even if he is brave! You know him! Max von Dornberg might not care to fight *à l'outrance*, with three loving women on his hands, but I'll be gage for his meeting Lazareff on the field of honor!

"No von Dornberg ever was a coward! You may have heard how Adolf von Dornberg flowered late into the passion of 'beauty hunting.'

"He was done to death among the wildest and most amorous women of the world, the peers of the Abyssinians—the wily beauties of Bucharest!

"You have no legal jurisdiction over the really foreign yacht 'Aslauga,' belonging to a Swedish reigning Countess, when a Russian girl falls overboard, the companion of a Circassian Princess! I would not stir up a hornet's nest about the dead woman!" He lowered his voice.

"You, a member of the Haut Police, know very well that Olga Luboff was forced upon this young princely captive only to guard her, as a companion, from the intrigues of the Turkish Ambassador, or Ghazi Schamyl!

"During our war, if Princess Zenaide had been spirited away to the Caucasus, we might then have had a fire in our rear! She has never succumbed to the inevitable, and she never will! Nature has crowned her a queen!"

"I rely upon your good offices! I place myself unreservedly in your hands," said General Gorski, as the "Livadia" rounded to, in the deep water off the cove.

There was a party in waiting at the landing quay when the barge of the "Livadia" landed the two Generals.

Dragonoff's heart throbbed with a genuine admiration as the Princess Zenaide advanced to welcome her guests. Behind her, the Intendant and the old butler were in waiting with carriages for the expected party.

"Do you bring us the Countess?" eagerly cried Zenaide, as she gave her old guardian a monitory glance. "Nadine has been expecting Max and the Countess back every day since the ball!"

Even the iron nerve of the old veteran deserted him.

"Nadine is here?" he murmured, while General Gorski's face took on a hungry look of expectation.

"Certainly," composedly answered the stately young Princess, as she led the way to the carriage. "She came home in von Mollwitz's yacht, the 'Asgard.' The Countess had given her permission to return with them, and they ran in to the point, landed Nadine, and then kept on to Dago, for they had their *fête de famille* on the very day after the ball.

"I have not told Nadine of the Countess's illness, for I thought you would bring Max and our dear Marie home to us."

"And, Nadine herself?" cheerfully said the old General, as he seated himself at the young beauty's side.

"Is a little indisposed, but she has deputed me to do the honors to her mother's guests! She would not have the Countess alarmed by the news of her slight illness!"

With a moody brow, the baffled Ivan Gorski surveyed all the beauties of Dornberg when they had reached the great plateau on the heights. His whole theory of the strange occurrences was upset by the coolly contrived story of the Circassian.

Standing upon the grand terrace overlooking the outstretched island the parvenu General threw up his hands in a sudden delight.

"Gods! What a natural fortification! We must have this island! It is the key of the rear gateway of Reval

and Esthonia! It is worth a prince's ransom!" He burned to meet his disguised police spies who had been scattered among the villagers.

And, conceited and thick-headed, he was only flattered by the attentive hospitality which kept the Intendant or the old butler in obsequious attendance upon his person. He did not grasp their real character as spies!

An hour passed on before the great dining-hall was thrown open to receive the secret emissary of the Czar's Governor-General.

Dragonoff was in his most genial mood, while the Princess Zenaide, with becoming dignity, presided in place of the absent mistress. Even Gorski was deceived by the cordial bonhomie of the brave-hearted daughter of the Tcherkess.

"In my land, General," she said, laughingly, as she pledged her guest in the sparkling wine which the Russians love, "the guest is sacred, and honors the house! You are welcome to Dornberg!"

Dragonoff murmured, "Danton was right! *De l'audace, toujours de l'audace, encore de l'audace!* By Jove, this girl will win! But, it is a desperate game!"

He was only revolving in his mind the story whispered, fearfully, to him by the white-faced Nadine Valdor, as she told of the terrible sufferings of the three clinging to the thwarts of the fishing-boat in the wild darkness of that Baltic storm. And while every throb of his gallant old heart beat in the happy refrain, "Max is safe, at last!" Dragonoff watched Zenaide slowly fascinating the burly parvenu General. The vain fop yielded to the charms of the lovely Tcherkess.

"Here is an ally—the heiress's only friend!" mused Gorski, as he drank to the health of the absent Lady of the Isles.

With an easy unconcern, the name of Max von Dornberg dropped from Princess Zenaide's lips. And, lulled by the generous wines, the Police General forgot the olden sharpness of his trade.

It was a mere matter of formality, the after-dinner review of the three servants who, with the four men, made up the crew of the yacht. General Dragonoff listened to Intendant Patkul's story of how the un-

fortunate girl's foot had slipped as she turned to go forward to order her mistress's dinner. Over the low rail she had pitched without a cry, and then he related the vain cruise around the disaster. "She went down like a flash, and sank like a shot!" he gloomily concluded. "The Barina was below!"

And rosy-cheeked Tatiana told of the wild cry, "Man overboard!" and how the four frightened sailors left their vodka to spring to the aid of the Intendant.

Then the old butler told of his work in superintending the men's dinner. "I had just gone back with some vodka. Alexei was at the wheel, for we were getting ready to make the long tack into the sound. I ran back and helped to calm the Barina. But I was too late, *I saw nothing!*"

When the servants had vanished, the Princess Zenaide herself calmly related the unfortunate occurrence. "The yacht was pitching fearfully, and I only reached the deck in time to see Alexei gazing over the stern, as he yelled for aid!"

"We had just shipped a great wave," had said the Intendant, "which poured over our starboard quarter and carried off one stern kedge-anchor!"

"The decks were slippery, and I had no chance to grasp her! The yacht fell off when I dropped the wheel, and we were drifted a dozen cables' lengths away before we could bring her to the wind! No one could have launched a boat in that weather!"

This parting statement, coupled with Princess Zenaide's calm story, dispelled all the General's first suspicions. Frankly plausible enough was the well ribbed-up story.

In his great guest-chamber that night, he pondered long over the whole situation. "I dare not remain and poke around the island here like a thief-catcher!" he mused. "If I could only come back here, alone! My four men are scattered in the fishing villages. They may have seen something of the absent Max! I must trap him! And there is but one way—a thorough search here while the Countess is still ill at Hapsal!"

His long experience of every form of duplicity aided him in making a plan of his own.

When old Elia brought him the spiced sleeping-cup

of the old Swedish nobles he was in a perfect state of good-humor.

"Yes, that is the way! Prince Katkoff must delay them there at Reval, and I will come back here, reluctantly, armed with a warrant to apprehend the young fugitive. This sly girl may have concealed him here! For every one of these Oestlanders would die for the last of the von Dornbergs!"

The firelight played upon Princess Zenaide's resolute face, as she stood alone with General Dragonoff in front of the great mantel in the lonely drawing-room. "Have you nothing to tell me, Aida?" demanded the veteran. "You can trust me with your life!"

Her hand, trembling in his own, was cold as ice, though a fever burned upon her cheeks. How well she had played her part only her stern Tcherkess heart knew! But she merely bowed her head in silence.

"Not yet, not yet!" she cried at last, throwing herself into his arms. "It is for the woman who has warmed me in her heart—for Nadine—that I struggle to save Max! But if he should be taken, there is a way—only one way—then to save him! You must take me to the Czarewitch, and take me in time! Don't let them stop me! At the last I can save him, but only with your help!"

The sunlight of daybreak glittering on the pines of the great forest around the lonely château showed to General Dragonoff's anxious eyes the black smoke pouring from the funnel of the "Livadia."

With a truly Russian slyness, General Gorski had slipped out before daybreak, and one of his own spies, hovering around the château, had raced away to bid the others embark for the shore. "I will have their whole story at Hapsal," mused General Gorski, as he left Dragonoff and the Princess studying over his sudden departure.

Soon the long, trailing smoke told of the vanishing of the "Livadia," and the anxious Dragonoff was not undeceived. This haste boded no good to Max.

On the second day, the liberated "Aslauga" brought a telegraphic request from Governor-General Prince Katkoff to bring the Princess Zenaide to Reval to certify to the death of the unhappy Olga Luboff. "I will take

Nadine over to the de Bellegardes," cried the General, grimly. "You and I will go up in the 'Aslauga' to Reval. Nadine can watch over the Countess, and I will be at your side to face Katkoff!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE HUNTED FUGITIVE.

General Michel Dragonoff calmly smoked his cigar forward, as the "Aslauga" sped away on its return to Hapsal's happy shores. He thoughtfully eyed the two dissimilar beauties seated there in grave converse at the stern, with a growing astonishment.

Nadine Valdor was happy, even light-hearted, and she had also joyously packed up her wardrobe, in anticipation of a lengthened sojourn at the Château de Bellegarde. She had promptly detached Tatiana and old Elia to accompany the Princess Zenaïde to Reval.

"It is a blessing of God that Fedor Lazareff cannot intrude upon her now," mused the old General. "Though Marie is ill, and Max, God help him, is a fugitive, Nadine is perfectly safe from all annoyance at the Château de Bellegarde. I must warn her never to leave the park save with Alixe, or under Bellegarde's escort.

"And, moreover, Lazareff knows that I am a tutor and co-trustee. I shall privately warn Count Biren." He was as yet in the dark as to the whole movements of the two fugitives from the time of their departure to the present, save that Max was safely on his way to Aberdeen.

For Nadine Valdor, prompted by the acute Tcherkess girl, had remained prudently silent. "Dear Guardian," she murmured, "Zenaïde will tell you all! I shudder to speak as yet of these three awful days of wandering." The simple old soldier never knew how craftily Aida would preserve, unblemished, his spotless loyalty to the Czar and the Grand Duke. The two women had privately agreed upon the whole situation and its pressing needs of mutual reticence.

There was a deserted harbor, dreamy silence in the streets, and drifted leaves already on the lonely "Stille

Promenade," when the General and the two beauties were whirled through the lonely streets to the Château.

No sign remained to tell of the Grand Duke's splendid ball, or the mad treasonable attempt. The yachts had all fled away, the gallants and beauties were now scattered, as Nadine Valdor was silently conducted to the rooms of the convalescent Countess von Dornberg. The two comrades of the Catherine Institute took leave of each other with mutual pledges of silence.

In the half hour before General Dragonoff returned to continue the voyage to Reval, he learned of the general scattering of the Esthonian nobles, and the secret sessions of the Court of Inquiry, whereat the ambitious Procureur-General had examined in secret fifty witnesses.

But the drag-net, so often cast, had brought in no fish, and the Cercles de Noblesse of Dorpat, Reval, Riga, and Arensburg had settled down to the conclusion that Max von Dornberg had showed the white feather and fled. He had simply avoided fighting Lazareff.

The truculent Lazareff, with General Gorski, watched the "Aslauga" skim away and turn northward toward Baltischport. There private telegrams reached General Prince Katkoff, as early as General Dragonoff's own announcement of his coming,

And, the ambitious Gorski, also, had warned the Ritter von Geist, now an official guest of Nicolas Katkoff, in the great Governor-General's palace, overhanging the three towns crouching under Reval's castled citadel.

Gazing back on the crumbling towers of the old Schloss, where eighty cannon in olden days had scourged the Russian camps with their fire, General Dragonoff called the Circassian to his side. He had thoroughly searched the yacht to see that no smuggled spy was on board.

His heart was at rest as to the beloved ones at Hapsal, for the artful General Gorski had relaxed all apparent precautions. The storm seemed to be drifting past them now!

The Count de Bellegarde had pledged an absolute silence, and vowed also to guard Nadine as his very life. And there was now no fear of Countess Marie von Dornberg! She was sunk in a gentle melancholia and her mind had not awakened to the cares of the present. The two men's eyes met in a meaning pledge.

"You and I must simply know nothing!" Dragonoff said warningly. "Not a soul must be allowed to talk of this strange disappearance! For the sake of the three here, we must ignore the one who has gone away.

"Some madcap prank of Max's youthful passions, and, when the light flame has burned off, he will return! You and I will stand firm to help, but the less said the better.

"Our only appeal is to the Czar and the Grand Duke. I fancy, too, that Katkoff will not forget that I am, still, the Lord of Hapsal, and you, the First Aide-de-Camp of the Czar!" And, yet, their hearts were filled with gloomy fears—*they were in Russia!*

All was done that love and care could do. And now Dragonoff tenderly turned to the spirited Circassian.

Little did he know that in her snowy bosom were concealed the fatal note which had led Olga Luboff to her awful death, the crafty bidding of von Geist, coward and knave, an unsigned note, calling on Max to meet him at the Bathing Pavilion to be trapped to his death, and, also, the confession which had been forced out of the dead woman's trembling heart, by the hope of saving her wretched life.

"You have warned Nadine to say nothing?" anxiously demanded Dragonoff.

Then the beautiful Circassian smiled a wintry smile. "Poor child! Love has sealed her lips, for she adores von Dornberg. It is the fate of such rattle-heads to gain the unfaltering love of good women. This same love is a strange fever here in your mad Russia!"

Michel Dragonoff blushed as he dropped his eyes. In his youth he too had drank of the Circean cup, pledged by many a glowing lip. "Love is love—the world round—in all times, in all seasons, and it is the eternal plant of life, the one heart-nourished growth, which feeds upon itself.

"For, many a fond woman forgets the lover in the love itself, and loves on to her own undoing for love's sake alone. Without law, proof against locks and bars, love throbs in every pulse of manhood, love quivers in every soft sigh of woman's defenceless heart. And those who laugh early, too late, learn to repent the bitter scoff!

"For Love, self-created, is its own avenger! And what

is left of Life when Love is gone? *Only husks and ashes!*" he mournfully said.

A pang of pity for the first time rent the maiden's marble breast. Of a royal race, like the captive nightingale, the queen of song, she could not give birth to love in the duress which galled her sovereign heart as pure and unapproached as the summit of the Jungfrau. But her heart was stirred by the old man's sad words!

"Poor Olga Luboff," she sighed, in her obdurate heart, now softening for the first time. "This comely lump of animated military tailorship, this village hero, Ivan Gorski, led you on to your death, for Love's sake!" With a choking sob, Zenaide recalled the crafty lines of the Ritter von Geist in the decoy note to the love-blind Max:

"Let Olga Luboff saunter out with you. It will dispel all suspicion, and Gorski will meet her and take her away with him." It was Love's shining lure which Olga Luboff followed, for on that festal night, the copses of the garden of Schloss Hapsal were filled with lingering couples, whose burning eyes told the old, old story to "eyes that spake again!"

"Love would slay and Love would save! Love would betray, and Love will still, guide and guard!" She felt a wave of unknown warmth melting her iron heart. She had trapped the spy and struck home, for Love, for Love of the noble woman in whose home, and heart, at whose hearth she had drawn the breath of Liberty in a life captivity, of the freedom of the welcome of a mother's arms.

But the stern blood of warrior-kings still throbbed in her indomitable heart!

In far Circassia, the royal chiefs had always possessed the power of meting out life and death, and the wild young eaglet was of the brood of the mystic Schamyl whose own mother had died under the lash.

"I will answer for all! It was written in the stars!" she said, as she fingered the mystic amulet, whose graven, priceless turquoises contained the secret of her princely birth carved in the quaint cryptograms of Daghestan.

All the story of Nadine's desperate boat-voyage with Max was made known to the brave old Aide-de-Camp

when he saw the stately girl go below to gain a needed rest before facing the terrors of a smooth inquisition. Late that night, when the yacht had doubled Spint Head and swept along the beautiful shores, racing wing-and-wing onward toward picturesque old Reval, Michel Dragonoff pondered over Princess Zenaide's story. He was oppressed with many gloomy forebodings. The future looked black indeed.

"There is some strange mystery here!" he sighed. "Marie and the de Bellegardes seem to know nothing. Nadine's lips are sealed, this strange, wild girl gives me only a part of the enigma, and Olga Luboff's lips are now dumb forever!"

There was that in the Circassian's confident mien which bade him cease to doubt and to fear. The gleam of a coming victory shone in her dauntless eyes, and yet the shadow of a secret haunted them. What could a helpless girl do to save an outlaw's life?

"Can they be deceiving me?" he wondered. "This Luboff woman was selected by direction of the High Orphans' Court, as Zenaide's official companion. Did she fathom some dark intrigue?"

"And have the Brotherhood of the East forcibly spirited her away to shield Max?"

He remembered the young Count's last loyal words, and his pledge of an answer later at the unfortunate ball, a meteor which had illuminated Hapsal with its splendor, and then burst to scatter the social fragments far away from the splendid scene of the Hôtel Salon. It had been a strange festival!

"Have they trapped him with their specious pleadings, and hidden him also?" He dared not doubt Princess Zenaide's faith, but the story was but half-told, it seemed now. "If Katkoff finds her out in any fabrication, then the family of von Dornberg may be reduced at once to the level of the prosecuted and attainted Pole.

"Without a local habitation and a dwelling-place," he sadly mused, as he gazed at the brave old flag of the three crowns and white falcon fluttering above. "It may be the last time!" he sighed, as he sought his rest.

His dreams were haunted by Zenaide's relation of the chilling mists, the wild winds, and the gusty rain smiting the frail fishing-boat.

He knew now how Nadine's tender hands had bled as she bailed out the water, while Olof and Max held the boat on its course over the surging waves.

He had been told of the sudden appearance of a Russian gunboat in the mist, and of how Max had leaped overboard and hidden himself inside a signal beacon, whose triangular sides gave him a safe perch.

The deck officer of the "Seevoutch" had only seen from his station a shock-headed peasant and a frowsy mass of rags lying in the bottom of the boat, with vague outlines of a woman's form.

Half-starved, drenched, wearied, and disheartened, they had toiled till Max had clambered up the side of the brig "Gustavus Vasa."

It was the story of a peasant's fidelity, a woman's loving heroism, and a man's dauntless fortitude!

When Dragonoff arose and sauntered on deck, they were gliding past the sandy islands where the ironclad fleet were thundering away in their target-practice.

The open sea stretched far to the north; the sandy, wooded shores of San Brigitte rose up to the east.

Far away to the south the perfumed groves of the Katharinenthal hid the villas of the soft-bosomed dames who courted the haughty Russian officials.

On the starboard quarter, loomed up the great castled citadel, with the Dorn and the Governor's palace. The old forts grinned above the curving quays, with their thick forests of masts. There was the war-flag of Russia flying, too, on the little police-tug, which moved about to keep vessels in the line of the red-flagged safety buoys, for shot and shell hurtled across the harbor. It was the time of the summer target-practice of the great fleet.

Rich, dreamy old Reval clustered around the giant basalt crags above the new town, the old town and the tents of a strong brigade shone out in silvery cones in the Elysian fields to the south, beyond the great bastioned enceinte, with its deep moat, now nourishing the sluggish carp.

Laughing children piloted their skiffs on the still waters of the moat, now lined with quaint, overhanging houses, bowered in fragrant gardens.

Reval and Helsingfors harbors, the pearls of Oestland

and Finland, then sheltered a mighty division of iron-clads, with over-towering frigates and snaky torpedo-boats. For the flag of great Russia had come to stay.

General Dragonoff's loyal heart beat in pride as the breezes wafted the roll of drums and the singing of the bugles across the water.

When he turned, Princess Zenaide, radiant as a morning star, was at his side. Her delighted eyes rested on the superb panorama, and swept the line of the matchless Seven Towers.

There were long railway trains speeding to and fro, the smoke of three thousand happy homes hung dome-like over the great *entrepot* of the Baltic, and, as they glided within the encircling arms of the mole, with its long lines of grinning cannon, the daughter of the Tcherkess mourned "Russia! Mighty Russia!"

Her heart sank within her.

Dozens of steamers lay there unloading rich goods from lands of snows and lands of sun; there was a great fleet of sailing vessels moored in the great basin, and a wilderness of fishing-boats and schooners, with their hardy crews trafficking for the spoils of the Baltic, with the women thronging the long quays.

Companies of blue-eyed hardy soldiery, clad in white linen, swung along, their caps and blanket-rolls shining under the blue steel of the cruel bayonets.

Squads of jolly sailors thronged the fleet of man-o'-war's boats darting around, and officers and orderlies clattered about on horseback, speeding along to where the great bastion defended the main city gate, under the shadow of the coppered spire of the old Lutheran church, where the Swedish kings had once worshipped. It was a brilliant and a varied scene.

Princess Zenaide sighed, for on the highest point of the castled mountain gleamed out the gilded Byzantine clustered domes of the magnificent Greek orthodox cathedral, its double-armed, gilded crosses overtopping all the splendid scene.

It was the conquering sign of that mighty power whose mailed hand sweeps from Kars to the frozen shores of the Lena, from captive Warsaw to the icy Strait of Behring, and from the Pamirs to frozen Archangel.

The power whose hand is even now on the throat of China, the power destined to soon swallow up Persia, Norway and Sweden, and to rule from Peking to Cracow, and from Constantinople to far Archangel! Germany's dreaded neighbor, the master of the Turk, the insincere ally of glittering, café-governed France, the hereditary foe of England, and the friend of no other land on earth! The awful domain of the White Czar!

Suddenly, with a suppressed shriek, Princess Zenaïde grasped General Dragonoff's arm, as a police-boat, with a bedizened officer and a dozen sailors, approached the "Aslauga," swimming gently, like a tired swan, on the still waters of the inner basin.

"Call Patkul, Tatiana, and Elia at once! Quick! Quick! For God's sake!

"Keep the officers back while I give them their instructions! Look there! Look! Look! Oh, my God! *He is lost!*"

The General's face blanched with a sudden horror as he saw, within a cable's length, a dismayed Swedish brig, on whose box-like hull he slowly read the words:

"GUSTAVUS VASA—STOCKHOLM."

The deck-load of lumber was still untouched, and the decks were all covered with a trailing mass of wreckage, as the stout riggers toiled to undo the work of the cruel storm which had left the derelict to the mercies of wind and wave.

"Where do we shelter ourselves?" whispered Princess Zenaïde, as the General sprang back to her side, whispering: "They are all in the cabin. Go down and send them up, one by one, to report here for police examination. I will look out for the sailors. We go to the Hôtel Petersbourg."

With a last glance of agonized entreaty, the brave girl swept away, as the boarding officer's head appeared over the deck.

She clutched the precious papers tightly in her bosom, and was lost to sight in a moment. It was her own firm white hand that hooked the cabin doors as she turned and faced the three frightened attendants. She whispered to her faithful body-guard:

"The young Master is hiding here in Reval! He is disguised as a common sailor, or a fisherman. He has

neither money nor passports. We will be at the Hôtel Petersbourg.

"Now, on your lives, for the Countess's sake, find him! find him! Oh, my God! Bid him be quiet! We will try to save him. Tell him nothing is known as yet. The 'Gustavus Vasa' was blown back here with him on board.

"She now lies dismasted. You all know what to do. Here is a thousand roubles each. Find him, and——" she grimly smiled as she drew out the blank passports fabricated by Casimir Pulawy.

"These are all real, and visèd to leave Russia. Bid him fill in a Swedish peasant's name."

The three faithful followers stood gazing with blanched cheeks. "You, Elia, know every corner of Reval. You, Patkul, know the wharves and the shipping, the shops and the burghers. You are a woman, Tatiana—Russian, too! *What can you not do?*

"The one who saves him shall be rich as a Barin—spend money like a king's ransom. Come to me, night or day, at the Petersbourg. Find him, bid him only be quiet, and we will save him. I shall send you all on shore as soon as the police see your passports.

"Now, Patkul, the boatswain will keep the ship and give you two sailors. No one is to have the secret but you three. And not a word to the General; only talk to me. On your lives—go!" She pushed Alexei Patkul on deck, and then old Elia, whose eyes promised his devotion.

When the stately Princess received the visit of verification of the handsome officer, she smiled and dropped her eyes.

The serpent was now awake in her bosom, and her beauty fascinated the Captain as he accepted the wine of compliment.

But Elia and the two others were already far away before she had learned the story of the wrecked brig.

The youthful Captain was as wax in her slender white hands. "Such accidents are very common on the Baltic, Princess," he said, as he gazed in rapture at her exquisite beauty.

For, Captain Serge Lemacheffsky was a social lion and the Deputy Port-Admiral. "She will be repaired

in a month and go on her way. Her sailors are having a jolly Jack tar spree on shore. The brig was towed in by a steamer. I gave all the men their 'shore cards,' and telegraphed the owners by order of the Port-Admiral."

A half hour later, Serge Lemacheffsky handed the star-eyed patrician into the carriage sent by the hospitable Prince Katkoff.

On the quay, General Dragonoff, sadly uneasy at heart, gravely dismissed the staff officer sent to welcome his party. "I shall pay my respects to the Prince Governor-General at once, as soon as I have placed the Princess Zenaide in comfort at the Hôtel Petersbourg," he said.

Already, the gallant Captain Lemacheffsky had sent an orderly clattering away to retain the state guest-chambers of Reval's once elegant *hôtel du monde* for that distinguished old soldier, General Dragonoff, whose gold starred straps bore the Imperial crown of an Aide-de-Camp of the Czar. But his heart was filled with a sudden devotion to the brave Tcherkess girl.

Captain Lemacheffsky, looking into the shining eyes of the Diana-like young goddess, never knew that she exulted for the first time in the power of woman's beauty.

For la Princesse Zenaide had promptly answered the young gallant's proffer of official courtesies. "I would like 'shore cards' and *laissez passers* for all the yacht's crew," the blushing dissembler murmured. "I have sent our own captain up to the city."

Turning to an orderly, Lemacheffsky whispered a few words, and then returned to the worship at this new shrine.

"You must have General Dragonoff take you on a cruise around the bay," said the artful Aida, as the young officer countersigned a dozen official passes.

"And I may—I may call, and pay my respects?" he demanded, timidly, as the now alert General Dragonoff seconded the Princess's invitation.

Her eyes gleamed with pleasure as she returned the meaning pressure of his hand, but they were veiled behind the trembling lashes when she murmured: "I shall be very happy to meet you again."

The carriage swept away, leaving the young officer standing there uncovered, as if a reigning queen had dismissed him.

"I would lay my life down for such a woman!" he murmured, as he sighed and turned away.

At the head of the quay, the Princess turned and saw him still standing there.

A sudden impulse seized her, and a dainty lace handkerchief fluttered in the breeze.

"If he were only not a Russian!" sighed the beautiful Circassian, as she saw the young man's cap waved in an instant answer. Her heart was firmly locked against her country's foes.

But, roguish Dan Cupid, looking down from aloft, smiled as he restrung his golden bow from his inexhaustible quiver. "That was a long shot, but it went straight to the mark," hummed the rosy god, as he intoned a hymn to the all-ruling Aphrodite, to whom the peerless Sappho sang on the marble steep of Paphos. For Love shall rule as long as the sea throbs over Sappho's memory-haunted pillow.

When the beautiful "Aslauga" sped along under the shadow of the great cliffs whence the wild Esthonians saw the galleys of Albert of Riga and his *Porte Glaives* sweep into the bay like fierce cormorants in 1211, two men sat overlooking the magnificent scene from the balcony hung out in mid-air from the Governor-General's palace.

Prince Katkoff handed his field-glasses to the grave Ritter von Geist, and drained a glass of wine from the rich table set out before them.

"That is the 'Aslauga,'" quietly said the Ritter. And then Prince Katkoff swore a mighty oath. "I will tear that flag down from the mizzen, and raze the flag-staffs on the Island of Worms! Have you obeyed all my orders?"

The Master of the Secret Brotherhood smiled grimly: "Everyone on that yacht will be dogged night and day. It is strange there is no trace of Max yet. But they will communicate either by letter, telegraph, or messenger. Give me another week and I will trap him—through them!"

"You must clear out to the Countess Pulawy's villa,"

musingly said the Prince. "Old Dragonoff is a great stickler for etiquette! He will be here soon to make his *visite de ceremonie*."

The Ritter's face was lit with a baleful smile. "I am glad to be at my work. If we could only get the Countess Marie and the Baroness Valdor up here!

"For, this fellow in hiding will surely try to communicate with his mother and the woman whose fortune is too good a thing to lose! He is young, heedless, rash, and stupid! Only a brave fool!"

"You shall see! I will put the pressure on gradually!" ominously said Prince Katkoff. "If Lazareff was not a drunken fool he could have the *entrée* of the Château de Bellegarde; and Gorski is too much in love with his new General's epaulettes yet to have recovered his reason."

"But, I will order the girl up here. She must come! And, if the Countess is shamming illness (as I suspect), I will worry them all, until Marie von Dornberg also comes here. Then, *we will have them all in a trap!* But, where the devil is this Max?"

"He could only get away to Riga, to Abo, Helsingfors, Hango, or Stockholm. There has been nothing sailing direct for Copenhagen. We should have caught him before now!"

"Prince," suddenly exclaimed von Geist, "I have reason to know that this fellow has all the cool, dare-devil Swedish bravery! From Reval, only, are there direct steamers to England. And you know the blood-red flag of the cursed English is inviolable!"

"We take in here all the cotton and imports of northern Russia. Our spirit, wood, wool, and hide trade is enormous!"

"He might try to sneak on board one of the score of steamers leaving here weekly. He could get off at Stettin, Dantzic, Copenhagen, or Malmo, and so easily find refuge in Germany, Norway, or Sweden!"

"There is an idea in this," slowly replied Prince Katkoff. "Young von Dornberg could easily hide in any one of our outlying villages! These Oestlanders are like muskrats—all of the same appearance. And the peasants hate us! I will give Lemacheffsky the strictest orders to verify even the crews, to the last stoker, of all these outgoing boats!"

"Pray give the Countess Arline my compliments. I will join you there for dinner.

"Do not come here until I send for you, for old Dragonoff is no fool! As your evidence alone, convicts our man, when we catch him, the haughty old veteran might try to go over our heads to the Czar, tell his story, drag the beautiful Marie von Dornberg up to St. Petersburg, and so wipe out the work of years by a foolishly promised pardon! We must head them off!"

"Can you depend on Captain Lemacheffsky? He is a young officer to be really the Deputy Port-Admiral of Russia's third city! I might send half a dozen of my secret-service men to watch all the foreign steamers!" Von Geist was aware of the great stake he played for.

"Just look out for our visitors," smiled Prince Katkoff. "Lemacheffsky was in the Guards and on duty at the Palace. His family is one of the oldest in Russia, and he will be enormously wealthy! He is devoted to the Czar, and was only sent to me because a Grand Duchess became foolishly enamored of his youthful graces! That would never do; but all the same he will have a regiment of the Foot Guards before the year is over. He is a haughty devil, too, and will brook no man's interference! You must locate your man. That's all. He will never get away! Now go. There is Dragonoff's carriage coming up the hill."

Below them, in the deep-inclined covered way, leading to the town gate, a splendid carriage was crawling up the long incline, where Valdemar II. of Denmark and the Slav Prince Venceslas built Reval's ramparts on the site of the old Lindanissa, in 1219. From these heights, their men-at-arms had pitched the bold Pagans off the sheer precipice.

The Danish flag had waved there for a hundred and thirty years, till the proud Teutonic order bought the stronghold and all the fair Esthonia.

Pole and Russ, Dane and German scourged it with hostile fire, and two hundred and twenty years later, the Swedes entered the walls of the Seven Towers in victory.

A hundred years of alternating domain and the strong hand of Peter the Great seized it after the *Guerre du Nord*, to be Russian, as long as waters run or grass grows—held by the forest of bayonets and the grim, steel war-fleets now swarming in the Baltic!

For Peter's little ship, hewed out by royal hands, like the teeth of Cadmus, brought after it a dark crop of war engines, yearly multiplying, and every gleaming hull bears the flag that goes onward—the *blue-and-white St. Andrew's cross*!

"I hate this dirty work!" growled Prince Katkoff, as he entered the great room of state to receive the Czar's favorite aide-de-camp. "But, to get the command of Poland, I must first pacify the Oestland.

"If I could only leave de Bellegarde or Dragonoff as Viceroy here, instead of this dark schemer," the soldier-voluptuary sighed.

Von Geist had pandered to his love of secret pleasures, and there was a mighty power, too, behind the man who masqueraded as the local head of the Teutonic Knights.

It was the "Third Section" bent on finding the work of Samarin! "The old families must go! Someone must be made the first sacrifice," mused Katkoff. "I hate to war against a woman, but this mad boy has pulled down the old house which has braved the centuries!

"If I faltered now I would surely be overridden, and it is the will of the Czar! The Oestland must be Russianized—even as Poland has been lashed into silence!"

And so, he received his old friend with Punic faith, as a mere dissembler.

Half an hour later, as the brave old Dragonoff drove away, Prince Nicolas Katkoff sighed heavily, "Thank God! He can never suspect me, personally, for the masquerading Judas, von Geist, shall do all the dirty work!"

His own manly heart smote him as he drove away to where the Polish beauty now watched Ritter von Geist in a brooding silence, which the crafty scoundrel interpreted as a dreamy, sentimental sorrow for the lost lover. But from such brooding silence the thunder-bolt may strike down the strong man in his pride! It was the cunning, feigned sleep of the tigress!

General Dragonoff's face was clouded with sorrow as he patiently endured the mummary of the superb feast set out by mine host of the Hôtel Petersbourg, perched high upon the angled hill-sides of old Reval.

The single state of Prince Katkoff prevented the official appearance at the palace of the Princess Zenaide, who was royally robed, as she sat in the drawing-room of the suite reserved for *les hautes Excellences*.

Her eyes dropped when General Dragonoff gazed at her unaccustomed splendor. "It is only to mislead these people here," she murmured. "Just as if we were on a simple party of pleasure!"

General Dragonoff listened with a grave face to all the plans of the brave-hearted girl as she whispered to him her detailed orders to the three loving spies who were now exploring the antiquated old town. "We must wait, wait in patience, and if we find him securely hidden then we can study out a plan for his safe removal before he quits his cover!"

Something in her face told Dragonoff that she was hiding the truth from him. He clasped her hands in his own, and, steadfastly gazing in her eyes, begged her confidence. "Tell me all, my dear child! Let a father's heart aid you! I will risk person, place, the future itself! We must save him!"

The brave Circassian paled under his imploring glances. "I cannot lie to the brother of the man who died for me! Lies are for slaves! *There is something to tell!*

"But not yet—not yet! Only at the last! I dare not share with you the burden of my heart! But, noble friend, you alone shall know!

"For Max, Nadine, and the Countess Marie must never know the road that the Tcherkess girl has walked alone to save one who is loved, for Love's own sake! The Adighé never forget!"

Standing there, the regal hand raised in an impulsive gesture, she looked the very daughter of kings, one who was like William the Silent—"equal to either fortune!"

A daughter of the gods—divinely tall and most divinely fair! An avenging Amazon, for in her eyes gleamed the light which shone in Judith's gleaming eyes when she struck for her country.

But Princess Zenaide was only a woman, soft and tender, as the Governor-General was announced, making his *visite de retour*.

His attendant officer was Serge Lemacheffsky, who

seemed to have exhausted all the resources of a military *grande tenue*.

And, looking upon each other, the two young patriots intuitively divined the fact that their meeting was not altogether unexpected.

While the two magnates conversed gravely in the salon, Princess Zenaïde and the young Deputy Port-Admiral were soon in the midst of a Petersburg causerie.

The fact that the young Princess Arentzoff, the young soldier's rosebud cousin, was of the same golden circle in the Catherine Institute aided in shattering the "broken ice."

Her heart was strangely stirred by the silent appeal of the young man's eyes, and the Circassian forgot that she was speaking to her country's foe. "Dimitri Dragonoff must have looked like him," she murmured, as she uneasily eyed the growing gravity of the converse of the two seniors, for there were papers and telegrams spread out before them. "Was Max in danger?" She redoubled the battery of her charms. "*This young soldier shall help me to save him!*" she vowed.

Aïda, the diamond-witted daughter of the Adighé, caught Dragonoff's warning glance as Prince Katkoff, rising, approached her, with a silken courtesy of manner.

"I regret that I shall be obliged to detain you and General Dragonoff, as my official guests, until the arrival of the Baroness Valdor," said Katkoff; "and so, I have offered to General Dragonoff the villa of Countess Pulawy, on the Katharinenthal! You have all your own servants with you.

"A public hotel here is no suitable lodgment for persons of your rank! I now, for the first time, regret my single state, for my palace would then be at your disposal, and when Baroness Nadine comes, there is no suitable accommodation here, as you have the one suite which is reserved for the travelling nobles!" In vain, Zenaïde sought to read General Dragonoff's averted eyes.

She had already arranged for her servants reporting to her at all times. And, far away there, out in the Katharinenthal, they would all be easily spied upon! One precious half-hour lost in traversing the league of shaded driveway out to the superb park might cost Max

his life. And yet they must not arouse Katkoff's suspicions!

"I would prefer to remain here, at the hotel—at least until Nadine comes," said the Princess Zenaide, with a smile of gracious thanks.

"And I hope that Madame la Comtesse may be able to come, at once, for," said the Prince, suddenly changing his manner, "the death of Mademoiselle Olga Luboff has aroused a strange interest, *in the very highest quarters.*" Dragonoff was watching the young Circasian in suspense.

"To those who know nothing of the sudden violence of the Baltic storms," the girl gravely said, "it would seem to be almost impossible, and yet the sea was such that I saw nothing of my poor Olga after I reached the deck! The Intendant is here, who alone saw the mishap which carried her overboard! I am sure that all was done to aid her, but, she never rose!" The Prince seemed satisfied, but gravely attentive.

"I will leave it then to General Dragonoff to decide. Madame Pulawy will call and make her tender of hospitality in person. She goes with a hunting party of ladies and gentlemen soon to Weissenstein, and would be charmed, I am sure, to have you use her house.

"In the meantime, I have ordered Captain Lemacheffsky to attend General Dragonoff! There is a steam-launch also at your disposal. We have our local lions! The General has carte blanche at the Palace—the Club de la Noblesse, the Club Tête-Noires, the Club de Reval, and all the military messes. I shall ask him to advise me as to the new fortifications and the placing of the troops!

"Now, the ladies of our noblesse will all call on you!

"You have the Park, the San Brigitte, the Domberg, the château, cathedrals, Hôtel de Ville, the Guild Musée de Canuti, the magnificent royal Château de Katharinenthal—and, Captain Lemacheffsky will be only too glad to show you all of these!

"I have ordered your yacht to be free of all harbor regulations; but the cruising here is dangerous, and I advise you to use the launch for the many pretty excursions!

"You will find the old houses of the nobility, too, exquisite!"

It was an hour before Prince Katkoff had concluded his business, and yet Serge Lemacheffsky and his strange enchantress found the time all too short.

When they were left alone, Dragonoff drew the girl to his side. "Zenaide," he mournfully said, "Katkoff is slowly winding his toils about us! He will make the death of this girl an excuse to drag Countess Marie and Nadine here, and cut off all local help from poor Max at home! Be careful, my darling child! On you alone, seems to hang the last chance of Max's safety!" The old man was surprised at Zenaide's calmness.

"He wants to tie us up in a gilded cage, as social prisoners! You must find a messenger to get to Hapsal at once! I will send a letter to Nadine! Countess Marie must not come here! Let her stay there with de Bellegarde, who knows all. The Countess's illness must continue! But, Nadine can help me! And she must come unknown to them! Leave all to me!"

"You have heard nothing?" the veteran tremulously asked. He well knew how the snares were being set around them.

"Nothing yet," answered Zenaide; "but I will soon. It is written in the stars!" The girl's serene confidence restored the old man's drooping courage.

Long after the sad-hearted General slept that night, Zenaide, having finished her letter, watched the gay wanderers in the narrowed streets, pitching down to the bay on the south and west. It was midnight when Patkul stole to her door. She sprang to admit him.

Her hands were clasped on her heaving breast as he said, "The man who was picked up at sea kept his counsel, and he disappeared the very moment when he mingled with the crowd on the quay! I have been on the dismasted hulk! But, without money or passport, my poor master can only hide in the sailor slums, or lurk in a peasant's hut!"

"*Search, Alexei!*" cried Zenaide. "Visit all the squares, the market-places, the booths, and the sailors' drinking-houses! You must meet Tatiana and Elia, three times a day, at all these different places! Count von Dornberg is a stranger in Reval! You may stumble on him anywheres!" The faithful Intendant stole out into the night to resume his hopeless quest! Zenaide

prayed on her bended knees that night as she watched the un pitying stars!

Below her, not three squares away, as the midnight stars faintly lit up the deserted streets, a gaunt, tall man, clad in rude peasant garb, slunk out of the servants' doorway of the humble "Hotel zum Goldenen Adler," at the angle of the fortifications near the railway depot.

All day, hidden in the basement of the hostelry which was given over to German pedlars and travelling Russians of the lower orders, the hunted man had toiled, anxiously aiding the cooks and scullions!

His bed was a bundle of rags in a dark archway, his food the refuse of the table, with his face stained and his hair cropped—the son of a haughty noble aided every overworked menial of that underworld which was the bottom round of Reval's social ladder! It was a wretched and a desperate plight!

For a single breath of fresh air he now risked his liberty! In his bosom the revolver was hidden, and the knife was concealed in his girdle!

His hands were bruised and scarred, and his features were sadly changed by suffering!

The *moustache en militaire* had disappeared, and even the compassionate *stube madchens* believed him to be but a poor castaway Swedish sailor, an "illegal man," a creature who would shiver at the first rude cry of "Halt! Your papers!" of the passing policeman.

This human waif looked up in the night and saw the graceful shadow of Zenaide's form moving behind the curtains!

He gnashed his teeth in despair as he slunk back down the street to the "Goldenen Adler," for the night patrol came clanking down the hill!

"It is either death *first*, or death and shame *afterward*!" he growled, as he walked along, the pistol ready in his hand!

"I will kill two or three of them, and then die fighting! It is a soldier's death!

"Better than the clutch of the executioner!"

And that night, on his couch of rags, the hunted noble dreamed of the stolen delights of Weissenstein, and then of a far-away girlish face which had leaned

over him in the boat, and of lips which had kissed him in despair, when a giant wave almost overwhelmed their frail boat!

Three days later General Dragonoff found himself practically the prisoner of the astute Katkoff, who kept him separated from Zenaide, now the centre of a growing circle in which Captain Lemacheffsky was the star. But, one ray of hope gleamed out!

Nadine had safely received the letter, and neither Zenaide nor Dragonoff had been tempted to use the mails or telegraph.

It was midnight of the fourth day when Zenaide stole in and awakened the old General.

"Hush!" she whispered. "Tatiana has found him! Linger in disguise as a wretched scullion in the Hotel Adler! Do not light the lamp—come into my room. We must try and smuggle him out! For that hound, von Geist, is now systematically searching every house in Reval with a cloud of trained spies and secret police!"

CHAPTER XIII.

BETWEEN LOVE AND DUTY.

General Dragonoff's stern injunction when Zenaide concluded her brief story was one which began the dumb agony which thrilled the Circassian's heart for a week of intense torture.

"You must not dare to try to approach him, and, Tatiana must only see him, late at night. I will furnish you more money to aid him. He already has three thousand roubles and two blank passports, as well as a sailor's shore card and *permis de sejour*!" cried Aida. "I have sent Tatiana to him with advice to fill them all up as Olaf Olafson, Swedish sailor, age twenty-five, residence Stockholm, and I have nearly five thousand roubles left, of the ten you gave me," she concluded.

"Good!" the old General whispered, "and now, to plan for his secret removal. He must not try to meet either you or me. Patkul and Elia must also avoid him.

They will be watched. Let Tatiana appear to fancy the young wanderer, and she can judiciously distribute a few roubles among the kindly serving-women of the 'Golden-Adler.'

"Let me think till morning. Use your own keen brain. He must make but one move, and that must be to the boat which takes him away. Let Alexei the Intendant get every detail at once of all the vessels sailing in the next two weeks.

"I am sure that we are already watched, night and day, and so, neither of the two serving-men must know of Max's hiding-place. One drop too much of vodka, one single imprudent word, and then our whole cause would be ruined! For I have a couple of friends at work, and I find that this fellow von Geist is rioting with Nicolas Katkoff in all the hidden pleasures of the Katharinenthal.

"There is one arch enemy! *The Ritter von Geist!* He knows every hair of Max's head. And, God help us! I fear that von Geist has been hounding young von Dornberg down in all these years." He groaned in his helplessness to aid the young fugitive.

"There is a new mystery here," he said, despondently. "Every day, Katkoff is bearing down on me with an irresistible pressure, and he has some sudden *coup* in store. 'Katkoff the Tiger,' they called him, in the fearful war of Asia Minor. And so, nailed to the cross, I dare not show any agitation, and not even exhibit the faintest interest in Max. You are the forlorn hope! For once that my loyalty was questioned, good-by to all hope from the Czar!

"Be sure to occupy Prince Katkoff and leave all the rest to me," whispered the brave Princess Aida, "I have nothing to lose. And Marie von Dornberg shall live to know that a Tcherkess girl never forgets."

General Dragonoff was astonished, as the day came to bring on the veiled struggle again, to see Princess Zenaide shine out a very star of summer splendor. He knew that Patkul and Elia were both busied, and while he spent the morning with the now irascible Prince at the Palace, on his return he found Zenaide surrounded by a court of the laughing, light-hearted Russians who jest under the sword of Damocles.



The rooms were littered with the spoils of the bazaars, and, in the hall-way, the sailors of the "Aslauga" were on duty, clad in new uniforms of navy blue, with gold-lettered caps bearing the word "Aslauga."

It was hard to recognize Alexei Patkul in his resplendent garb of a yacht captain, and even old Elia was a nautical swell in a quartermaster's natty garb.

General Dragonoff rubbed his eyes in amazement as the Princess led her guests into a private banquet room.

"Captain Lemacheffsky is to be the pilot of the 'Aslauga' this afternoon, for he alone can take us around the bay, outside the lines of fire of the target-practice."

The dull crash of the heavy rifled guns shook the window-panes, but all was laughing, light-hearted merriment within doors over the flowing champagne. "We have a Tzigane band, and we shall dance on the decks," gayly cried Aida, "for our gallant pilot has loaned us his own steam-cutter to tow us around the bay, so do not expect us home till long after the sunset glow! It seems as if it never would be night here."

General Dragonoff was sick at heart. His own friends, summoned from St. Petersburg, had reported to him that the deceitful Katkoff and the sly Ritter von Geist were now busied late at night, with mountains of stamped papers, headed "Pour l'affaire Luboff," "Pour l'affaire du Comte von Dornberg." And he felt the dark chill of the coming shadow, the shadow of the gallows.

As the old aide-de-camp led the gentlemen away into their smoking-room, Zenaide whispered in a corner, "All this byplay is only to get a plentiful supply of suitable sailor garb safely to Max. They will be watching us! Go back to the Prince, and I will lead these butterflies a chase over the water. Who knows where the spy lurks? *Trust to me!*"

The old General was too sad at heart to rouse the high-spirited girl from her hopeful dream. He knew that "hell's iron gin" was creaking now, and closing down around him. For Katkoff, with an oily smile, had pressed upon him the loan of an official carriage, with footman and driver.

"A tribute to our old friendship! Be pleased to make use of these horses during your stay. They shall be at your door, daily." But, there was a menace in the

Prince's straightforward request for a change of domicile.

"I find, *mon Général*, that I must ask your party to remain until the Countess von Dornberg can join you. General Gorski telegraphs me it will be at least a fortnight before she can come.

"And I shall send the 'Livadia' to conduct her and her suite here. It can touch at the Island of Worms, and, so, on her way here, the Countess can bring such retinue as she chooses. I again beg you to take the villa of the Gräfin Pulawy.

"There will, I fear, be a long inquisition into this sad Luboff matter, and your whole party is absolutely needed here to clear up the ugly matter. Now, if the young Count were only at hand, matters would at once take a different turn." The listener was in agony, and, yet, forced to smile, and drink, and smoke, and laugh as usual.

And while smiling his thanks, General Dragonoff felt a dagger driven into his heart. "I see it all! Countess Marie and her kingdom are to be held in gage for the self-surrender of Max, if he is not taken as a skulking fugitive. It is the beginning of the end!" Powerless, and, with a sinking heart, he heard the cold words of his jailer-host.

But, gravely dissembling, he bowed his acknowledgment. "As soon as the Baroness Valdor arrives we will consider your Excellency's gracious offer," he said, as Katkoff invited him for an afternoon drive to the outlying camps of the Reval division of gray-coated soldiery. He was now environed both night and day.

The pale stars were gleaming down in the still twilight skies when the merry yachting party returned to throng the supper room at the Hôtel Petersbourg. There had been the very witching spirit of Love abroad in the calm glow of the eastern skies. "Each heart recalled a different name," but to the ripple of the flashing waters the bearded Muscovites told the old story again, that old, old story which is ever new!

At the wheel, the handsome young patrician Captain gazed up into Zenaide's glowing eyes, for he had been telling her "tales of the land and sea."

Stories of war and tumult, the history of the wounded

stormers at Plevna, groping together in the dusk and making their gashed and wounded bodies a last rampart for the regimental colors, while the men in a defiant chorus sang their Regimental Hymn, as a disabled Lieutenant, loading guns and passing them out to the few men able to fire, cried out, "Hold out, brothers! Help is coming! *The Czar never forgets!*"

Lemacheffsky did not finish that recital. He never told her that a Grand Duke took the great white cross off his own breast, and pinned it on the young soldier's breast, where the red blood trickled, crying with moistened eyes, "*Molodetz!*" A hero and the son of a hero!

For the story of the young officer was the record of his own bravery told in the hush of that starlit night, under the eyes of the woman whom he now madly loved.

"Let me be your slave, Zenaide," the young lover cried. "Give me the necklace from your breast, as the sign of my loving slavery."

And, then, in the evening's friendly shade, the beautiful Tcherkess stooped down to smile upon the gallant lover at her feet. Zenaide, the Circassian, bent her stately head and dropped her eyes.

"Will you obey me?" she whispered breathlessly, a strange tender light softening her dauntless eyes. "It was worn once by kings. I give you my whole birth-right. It came from a distant land—a land where lovers are true, a land of liberty!" she sighed.

"I swear it on my sword and, by these dear hands," he cried, as he kissed the trembling fingers which unclasped the carven turquoises from her graceful throat.

And, then, clinging to the roses he had given her, the soul of the rose went into her blood, and her eyes spoke to him! He turned his head away to whisper, "Beloved, wait! I dare not speak again. Wait for the coming days." He was drunken with the wine of happiness.

When all the merry-makers had gone that night, Serge Lemacheffsky lingered at the door. "Till tomorrow," he whispered, "I shall not sleep, for your eyes will shine down into my heart from the heaven you have made until I see you again."

Long before General Dragonoff returned, Patkul and old Elia had made their reports and been dismissed.

It was one o'clock when Tatiana crept into her mistress's rooms.

"Ah! Barina!" she cried, as she burst into tears. "They are now surrounding and searching all the houses in the street below the 'Goldenen Adler.' Lines of soldiers and police spies are hidden in the darkness."

The Princess rapidly recalled all the possible hiding-places in Reval which she had studied in the days of seeming frolic exploration. There was the great bath-house by the railroad station, the home of every insidious intrigue, the Jewish quarter, the fishers' huts, the sailors' haunts near the great distillery, the crowded moujiks' caravanseras near the railway, the old ruins of Saint Brigitte, the little cabarets in the crumbling walls of the Seven Towers, and all the hundred smacks and fishing schooners of the crowded basin in the great port, and now, her heart froze in an infinite terror as she heard the sound of marching feet.

"My God!" the brave girl cried. "He has money. It might only betray him. For Judas never dies! If Drag-onoff were only here!" And then she thought of the brave old soldier's spotless loyalty. "No!" she muttered. "His honor must be held inviolate. I will risk mine to save his life!"

She glided all around the vast apartment, and, then, suddenly stopped before a low cupboard-like recess, left in the irregular groined wall for a serving-maid to sleep within the sound of a mistress's voice.

"In there, in there," she faltered. "The 'Hurricane' sails for Hull direct on the morrow. And, if Lemacheffsky is a man, he shall either save him or he will see the woman he loves an avenging fury. Von Dornberg shall not be taken!"

She grasped Tatiana's arms and whispered that which brought the girl, trembling to her mistress's feet, a mere suppliant.

"It will be our death, Barina!" the poor girl chattered as she kissed the hem of her mistress's gown. For the tide of life was strong in her young heart, and she longed for the day when Alexei Patkul would make her his own.

The Circassian's eyes blazed! "You, a Russian woman, and you would betray him to the damned police! Go! or I shall throttle you here at my feet!"

As the frightened girl glided away, Zenaide whispered,

"At three o'clock the side door will be open, the rooms darkened! Tell him it is the only chance to escape the gallows! Here, take him my ring! Tell him I will die with him, or else save him! Go! There is the General's carriage!"

There were twinkling lights blazing out far above, on the citadel's heights, where Katkoff and von Geist held counsel this night of nights. The Prince was ferocious in his bitter mood, as he strode up and down in the supper-room tenanted by the two. For they had both fooled General Dragonoff to the top of his bent.

"These new, ferocious attempts on the Czar's life," growled the Prince, "will force us on either to success or ruin. It is only the strong hand now. My telegrams are imperative. I dread an instant removal. You have failed me!"

He glared at von Geist, and only the sweet slavery to Arline Pulawy held back his hand. For the arch-hypocrite was doubly necessary to him now.

The Ritter smiled sneeringly. "I only waited to get that old fool out of the way. I have the four men now here who were all summer on the island. One of them has just reported to me. They have plied the sailors with drink and haunted the port.

"A fellow picked up at sea, in an open boat off the Island of Worms, came in on the dismasted brig 'Gustavus Vasa.' And he took refuge at the 'Hotel zum Goldenen Adler' as a kitchen helper."

Prince Katkoff sprang to the bell. "Softly," said von Geist. "It is now two o'clock. At four o'clock, the house will be surrounded and searched from cellar to garret. The Chief of Police has his men ready. Anyone going in or out even now will be arrested, if suspicious. I will make you a present of your fugitive before morning. All I ask is that you keep him in hiding till we have Countess Marie and the Baroness Valdor here."

"*Right!*" cried the Prince, striking the table with his fist. "He shall go into the steel 'brig' of the iron-clad flagship, and from there, direct in chains, to the Polygon, on the Neva.

"I shall go out to the villa now. When the capture is made, come there at once. I will leave my valet on watch to bring me to you. Remain here till your bird is snared."

Throwing on a long cloak, the happy Governor-General disappeared, humming "Ah! Non giunge." There was the honeyed sweetness of a jealous lover's revenge in this capture.

Fedor Lazareff, in his drunken bragging, had not failed to tell the mighty Prince Katkoff of von Dornberg's stolen visits to the woman who had scorned Lazareff's brutal suit, and had betrayed a princely lover for Love's own sake. For a passion far beyond her control burned in the bosom of the woman now watching the stars on the Katharinenthal.

Arline Pulawy murmured: "Where is he, the homeless wanderer, to-night? Only to know him safe, I would lay down my life!" There was in that passionate heart the leaven of a self-purification. For whoso loves unselfishly has not lost the leaven of goodness.

With a wildly beating heart, the daughter of the Adighé heard General Dragonoff listen at her door on his return. The tired out veteran had masked the darkened windows, and then threw himself down to dream of the new sorrows of the coming day.

"God help Marie!" he murmured. "It is the bitterest cup that could come to her lips. Ruin, disgrace, the death of her only son!"

One last forlorn hope remained. An appeal to the Czar. Alas! there had been a new brutal mangling of the innocent in a dastardly railroad plot of cowardly assassination. The open hand of mercy had hardened into steel. Loris Melikoff was now slaying the innocent and guilty alike, with true Armenian cruelty.

Pacing up and down her darkened rooms, Zenaide, in a nest of spies, revolved every method of effecting Max's escape. "I shall have Elia, Alexei, and two sailors from the 'Aslauga' here to remove some of these useless purchases to the vessel. I can keep in my rooms till the Captain comes. The hotel servants never enter, unless my maid calls or I ring. There *must* be a way! There *shall* be a way out!"

As she travailed, in the agony of her soul, in a corner of the great bastion below the overhanging cliffs, hidden by the tall grass, Max von Dornberg and Tatiana waited for the Cathedral bell to toll half-past three. The night wind sighed over the broad moat, rustling the leaves of the tangled trees lining its banks.

The Count lay prone, like a wild beast at prey, but the pistol and dagger in his hands told of his grim oath. It had been the sharp-witted girl's plan to lead him out into the night, before the secret agents could surround the little hotel.

While they skulked along in the shadows of the old houses by tortuous, deserted side-streets, to the silent Hôtel Petersbourg, the agents of the police, black as crows in their inky garb, had silently closed every avenue of escape from the "Hotel zum Goldenen Adler."

The police, lantern and pistol in hand, were rousing up the twoscore of peasants huddled in the basement of the humble German hotel, as Max von Dornberg pressed the side-door of the private entrance leading to the Princess Zenaïde's sleeping apartment. There was a woman awaiting them there—a dauntless girl with a wildly beating heart!

In five minutes Max was hidden in the little cavern behind the servant's room, while Tatiana lay down on the floor in her mistress's sleeping apartment, behind the double locks and bolts which fenced off the maiden's boudoir from the great untenanted salon.

In the darkness of the night, with bated breath, Max von Dornberg listened to the brave Circassian's plan for his escape.

"It is only to save the family honor that I will make this last attempt!" he whispered. "But, remember, bravest and truest of all women, I die at your feet if detected! No von Dornberg ever felt a shackle! Death is freedom here in Russia! And the way to the Land of Liberty is always open. Its gateway is the grave, where tyrant and slave are equal."

The famished noble drank the wine held to his lips by the hands of a Princess, and then, when her graceful form vanished, he dreamed over her parting words in his narrow lair.

"You ask me how I will save you? The 'Hurricane' sails from the port to-morrow afternoon direct for Hull. Under the English flag you are safe on the high seas. I will find a hiding-place for you somewhere on that boat. Alexei will do that at the last moment.

"But, to put you on board, there is one who would lay his life down for me. He should be your brother to-morrow, for my sake!"

And, in her dreams that night, the Circassian orphan saw again the face of Serge Lemacheffsky, as he had bent his eyes, burning yet tender, on her, and vowed to be her slave.

Far below her, in his quarters, the young Deputy Port-Admiral slept, in the thrall of happiest dreams, for around his good right arm was wreathed the amulet of carven turquoises, still perfumed with the "forest violets" which she loved.

With the first streakings of the dawn, the Princess Zenaïde was astir, and with her own hands unlocked the side-door to allow of the exit of her maid Tatiana.

By seven o'clock there was the loud sound of packing and hammering in the great apartment, for Alexei Patkul and old Elia were both busied in preparing for the removal of the Circassian's many purchases to her yacht, securely tied up at the government quay, next to the little building where Captain Serge Lemacheffsky had his official head-quarters, with a dozen orderlies, boatmen, and police agents within call.

A squad of soldiers lingered always around the granite quay, where the young official's steam cutter lay, with steam up night and day.

By ten o'clock a couple of wagons and a covered is-vostchik were unloading the purchases of the young Island visitor, and the yacht's crew were all occupied in stowing them on board.

A force of men was engaged in preparing the "Seevoutch," Lemacheffsky's cutter, for a gala cruise, and the little steamer was gayly decked out with a summer awning and many flags.

At the Hôtel Petersbourg, over his morning coffee, General Dragonoff was astounded at the Princess Zenaïde's feverish gayety. For there was an unwonted animation in her manner which puzzled the old veteran.

"I have heard from Nadine," she cried, as she gave the old veteran her morning kiss, "and I beg you to do me a favor. I am sending all the purchased articles on board the 'Aslauga.' You must go to Prince Katkoff and tell him now that we will accept the offer of the Countess Pulawy's villa. For Nadine and I, will arrange all for Countess Marie's coming. It will please the Prince, and put him in a great good humor."



"But——" began the General.

"Don't ask me a single question!" said Zenaide. "Make all the arrangements. I am going out on the bay with Captain Lemacheffsky. I shall take Tatiana, and, of course, Alexei and Elia. We will be back here before sundown, and as you have the Prince's carriage, after we dine here we can drive out to the Katharinenthal. I will have the wagons to transport all our luggage, and Alexei and Elia will go with it. Tatiana stays with me." And Dragonoff, smiling, agreed.

"It will greatly please Katkoff," he briskly said.

When the old veteran climbed the heights of the citadel, he was astonished at the unusual activity of the soldiery and all the underlings of the palace. As he entered at the morning-room of Prince Katkoff, he was confronted by the Ritter von Geist hastening forth in a seeming state of deep concern.

The hurried greeting of the Ritter was soon forgotten as Prince Nicolas, with a glow of pleasure, listened to the General's acceptance of his proffer of fitting quarters.

"This is as it should be," the Prince cordially cried, "for there is the gravest news from St. Petersburg. Fresh attempts, new infamies, and I am ordered to have every vessel leaving here specially inspected. I've just sent down the new orders to Lemacheffsky."

Glancing at the two Captains on duty, as Orderly Officers of the Day, the Governor-General whispered words which brought a pallor even to Dragonoff's bronzed cheeks.

Princess Zenaide, gazing from her window, soon saw a carriage roll by, with the stern face of the Ritter von Geist gleaming out, as he urged his driver quickly down toward the harbor.

"They are enraged at their fruitless search," she gasped. "My God! If Lemacheffsky would only come!"

She was daintily robed for her outing on the bay, and Tatiana, near her beautiful mistress, watched Patkul with his two sailors and a few caught-up assistants, bearing the last of the cases down the side entrance to the street. And the smiling lips and sparkling eyes of Aida belied the silent agony of her heart.

It was eleven o'clock before the young Deputy Port-Admiral nimbly sprang out of his carriage and entered the room, bearing an exquisite offering of roses, lilies of the valley, and the incomparable Russian dark-blue violets.

He sprang up when the Princess Zenaïde entered, and stood aside, for Alexei, Patkul, and three men in sailor's dress were toilsomely taking out the last heavy case of the Princess's treasures of the bazaars and shops of Reval.

"Let these men wait at the yacht, Alexei," calmly said the brave Circassian. "I wish to give them a few roubles." And then, turning to her lover, she gave him a glance which raised him to the seventh heaven. He was in an earthly Paradise.

She stood before the great pier-glass, fastening a knot of the violets in her bosom, as the gallant youth murmured his apologies.

"Pardon for my delay! I have been on duty since daybreak. There are several steamers leaving to-day, and I have to search everyone of them for escaping rascals.

"Even the English boats—the Hull steamers—and our own Helsingfors packet. But the police can relieve me of the trouble.

"All I have to do is to run alongside and to take my officials and the secret police off. They have been doubled to-day, by the orders of Katkoff and this strange fellow von Geist, who seems to be a St. Petersburg official of the highest rank."

He stooped and picked up a jewelled pin which fell from the Circassian's trembling hand.

She turned, smiling sweetly, as she whispered: "*À votre disposition, Monsieur!*" but, he had seen the reflection of her face in the glass, and it was as if she had heard her own dread sentence of death.

She stepped down the stairway as graceful as a fawn, leaving her maid in charge of the half-dismantled apartments.

In the carriage, he pressed her trembling hands, and whispered words which soon brought the fleeting blushes back to her pale cheeks.

"It is nothing," she whispered. "It will pass; but

I have had bad news of the Countess, Serge; she is gravely ill!"

The young man's heart leaped up as, for the first time, he heard his name fall familiarly from her lips!

They threaded the streets of the quaint old city, and passed down the long quay, through lines of mingled troops and sailors, with dozens of port officials and police driving the half-tipsy stokers and reluctant seamen aboard three great steamers, from whose black funnels were now pouring out dense clouds of smoke.

The Helsingfors packet was already crowded with passengers, as they smartly drove by toward the official landing, and two officers, with a police sergeant, at their elbows, rigorously scanned each face mounting the gang-plank.

Suddenly the Circassian girl's head fell back helpless on the cushion, and a marble pallor made her face ghastly in its strained loveliness.

There, before her, on the other side of the basin, the "Hurricane," of Hull, was slowly swinging around, straining on the steel hawser, as her stem, inch by inch, turned toward the east, to clear the opening of the mole outside. She was in motion.

"Drive quickly! My God! I may be too late!" pleaded Zenaide, as her beautiful eyes met her lover's in one glance of supreme entreaty.

Leaning forward, the young noble urged his driver on, and in five minutes they were halted at the gangway of the "Seevoutch," where a crowd of underlings eagerly awaited their master.

Alexei Patkul was at Princess Zenaide's side in an instant, and the two men aided the half-fainting girl on board.

The Intendant whispered a few words, as Lemacheffsky brought Tatiana to her mistress's side. He was on his knees beside her as she lay on the circling cushioned divan at the stern.

"Speak to me, darling, speak to me!" he cried. "What is it? Let me lay my life down for you!"

Silently, the girl drew the silken curtains aside. There was the giant hulk of the "Hurricane" slowly forging past, the water spurting from her sides in cascades from the condensers, the deck covered with eager sailors, and,

high on the bridge, the bearded, bluff British captain, trumpet in hand, bawling his stentorian orders.

"There are two poor men waiting here, who have aided my Intendant in the embarking of my luggage. They belong to that steamer. It is ruin to them to be left! They will lose their very all, for the 'Hurricane' does not return to Reval. I only kept them here to reward them."

Serge Lemacheffsky laughed lightly. "Do not grieve, my darling," he whispered. "Let Patkul bring them on board my cutter. The steamer halts outside for my last inspection, and to have me bring off the police and officials. *I will put them both on board the steamer.*"

As he turned to the gang-plank to give his orders, three men leaped on board the "Seevoutch," for Patkul had disappeared in an instant.

And, while Serge Lemacheffsky's clear voice rang out, "Cast off the lines," a half-dozen police agents, breathless with haste, ran down the quay, crying "*Hold! Hold!*"

Princess Aida heard the shouting, and she sprang to her lover's side.

Serge Lemacheffsky was drawn back into the little cabin by loving arms, as a tall, gaunt man, in a dingy suit of blue rags, sprang past him, and, standing at bay in a corner, drew a gleaming revolver.

The red silken curtains gave the pale crimson gleam of the pigeon-ruby to the sunlight filtering into the little cabin.

There the brave Circassian beauty stood, her body barring the ingress of the Czar's police, whose voices rang out now in parley with the cutter's officers outside.

"They shall not take him! *If you love me, Serge!*" gasped Zenaide.

"Who is this man?" faltered the young officer, gazing on the lean face grimed with the stains of a stoker's trade.

"I am Max, Count von Dornberg!" proudly said the desperate man, his sinewy hand clutching the revolver-butt.

With one spring, Lemacheffsky tore open a closet-door.

"*In there!*" he whispered, as he pushed the tall stranger into his clothes-locker, and, turning the key, pocketed it.

Then, springing to the trembling woman's side, he hoarsely murmured: "I give you the honor of my sword! More than my life! Or, God! My duty!"

And then, twining her arms around him, Zenaide, the captive of the Czar, looked up into her lover's face.

"He is your brother now, Serge, for I give you—myself! Save him, for the sake of the love you bear me. He is innocent! I swear it upon this heart!" But Serge heard not her words. He was in an ecstasy!

Her lover only saw the woman whom he adored, standing there, her hands clasped upon her stainless heart, her face glowing with the light of a tenderness which would give herself in gage for the doomed man. The price of a life—a hunted fugitive's freedom.

With a finger pressed upon his lip, he knelt before her and kissed her icy hands. "*Jusqu'à la mort!*" he murmured, and turned calmly toward the door.

There was a few moments of earnest colloquy, and then, the police agents sprang ashore; they had been balked in their search for a fugitive who had been seen upon the wharves.

And then the click, cluck of the "Seevoutch's" screw sounded, as Captain Lemacheffsky muttered a few words to one of the sailors, who had boarded the little steamer.

The man disappeared in the coal-hole, with a grimy hand clutching the contents of Lemacheffsky's pocket-book.

There was no one in the little cabin but Zenaide and the man who had bought her with a price, when her lover, with a bound, sprang to the door of the locker.

The "Seevoutch" was racing along out of the opening of the mole when Serge held out his hand to the tall stranger.

"Thank her for your life, my brother. Make your last adieux. I have to take you through the fleet. Remember, you are not to even look at each other at parting! I will call up the other man, and when we are past the fleet you must mingle with my crew forward. Have you any papers?"

Serge was ghastly pale. "If the police should stop him?"

Max held out the passport for "Olaf Olafson—Swedish sailor, aged twenty-four"—and then, Lemacheffsky hurried over the description.

"Good! It fits out! Be silent when they address you, or else speak only Swedish. It is your only chance!"

When von Dornberg handed him back the *carte de séjour* and "shore card," the young officer's eyes turned, with a glowing tenderness, to the woman breathlessly watching them.

"You dearest witch!" he said, as he threw his arms around her and kissed her pale and trembling lips. "You are caught in your own trap! You made me give you these."

The clang of the engine-bell to slow down aroused them.

"Now, for God's sake, remember! Not even a backward glance! *Forward to freedom!*" whispered Serge, as he moved to the door. "Pull your cap down over your eyes and roughen up your hair. Blacken your face with coal-dust." He tossed the tall stranger a red woollen muffler. "Wind that around your neck and cover up your mouth and chin. I will send your people and the other sailor here to the door. Steal out now, before we reach the ship's side!"

In the cabin of the "Seevoutch," Max von Dornberg whispered to the dauntless woman: "Tell Nadine that her face haunts me as she bent over me in that last supreme hour of suffering! Tell her that now I can see the angel at my side!"

"And to my mother—love eternal! I go to Nice direct from England, and will await her in her villa there."

The grating sound of the cutter running alongside the huge ocean-liner aroused them. "May God be with you, brave darling!" sighed Max, as Serge Lemacheffsky opened the door.

The cabin windows were darkened by the black hull of the steamer.

With a wildly beating heart, Zenaide watched Alexei Patkul standing on the deck before the open door. Suddenly he made the sign of the cross; the ropes fell off with a loud splash, and in a few moments the "See-

vouch" was dancing in the wake of the great steamer churning away toward the open sea.

There was a group of keen-eyed officials standing now upon the forward deck of the cutter, and Zenaide noted the aplomb with which Serge Lemacheffsky, seated at the long table under the awning, ordered that foaming wine which always reaches the Russian heart.

Tatiana crept in to her mistress's side and murmured: "It is all over! There are no forts outside, and they cannot stop her now! *Look!*"

The brave girl saw the proud English flag flying at the mizzen, and the little pilot's skiff was dancing now behind the great freighter.

In half an hour, a police-cutter ran alongside the "Seevouch," and Captain Lemacheffsky's happy guests left him to return to their own guard-boat.

"Hurrah!" cried Serge, as he dashed into the cabin, where his lovely betrayer awaited him. "The 'Hurricane' has made her offing! There she goes! And we are alone—out at sea!" Kneeling at her feet, he looked up at her with burning eyes.

"Do you know that all our lives might have been forfeited had one of those tchinoviks pulled off von Dornberg's cap?"

"My God! I saw him but once before. He had disguised his appearance, but not his bearing. I whispered to him to let his shoulders droop and take the sailor's slouching shuffle. And now, Aida, you are mine! I shall claim you; but we must wait for the safety of this man. Great God! Katkoff must not suspect! We will be watched, and both of us may be interrogated. Remember, my heart beats in your bosom now!"

"There is but one way, Serge," said the splendid woman, as she laid her hand on his brow, making his every nerve quiver with a wild exhilaration.

"To-night, General Dragonoff takes me to the Villa Pulawy. Baroness Nadine must arrive to-morrow evening, and the poor Countess later. I will try to disarm all Katkoff's suspicions, and send the dear old Dragonoff to haunt his side all day.

"You must remain away from me until Nadine comes. Then, under cover of your friendship for General Dragonoff, you can call. Nadine will sacrifice her-

self for me. They will think that you court her fortune!" The brave captive was faintly smiling now! She lifted her head and proudly cried: "Do you know that I am only a penniless prisoner? That I have not even a name? I have nothing to give you—*nothing but my poor self!*" And then, her gallant lover laughed lightly.

His arms were wreathed around her as he boldly said: "I have wealth. Russia does not dare to disown her captive eaglet. And as for a name, *you shall take mine!* It is good enough for two."

"Listen, Serge!" she whispered, as she dropped her head upon his breast. "I have long been promised a visit to my mountains—to my native land. You shall come there and seek me, and there I will come to you. And I will love you as never man was loved before; for you are a noble man!"

"To-day has shown me that there is red blood in the Russian heart. Remember, never a word to Dragonoff or the Countess till I bid you speak! Our work to-day would bring him disgrace and banishment and send me to Siberia!"

Heart beating against heart, he promised her with his glowing eyes the obedience she demanded. Zenaïde followed the retreating steamer with her eyes, and gave her royal orders.

"And now you must run down along the south shore till we see the 'Hurricane,' hull down, in the open sea. After that, linger around the harbor until sunset, for I wish Dragonoff to weary out Katkoff's suspicions."

The fair Circassian enjoyed her *tête-à-tête* breakfast in that little cabin, where Tatiana watched the lovers with moistened eyes.

She stole out to meet Alexei Patkul, whose stout heart had almost failed him when he saw the two police officials soundly berate the laggard sailor, who dove sullenly down into the stoke-hole as soon as released.

"Thanks be to God! The Scotch engineer will earn a hundred pounds by giving my master his own cabin as soon as the sandy shores of the Oestland drop down to the gray sea," murmured Patkul to Tatiana. "Our fortune is made for life!"

There was a signal flying on the police-cutter that no more steamers could leave the port, and only when the

"Seevouth" raced into the basin at sunset did the startled Princess know that the other two steamers had been officially detained, that every house in Reval was now under espionage, and that telegraph orders had been sent to even research the "Kurfurst" on its arrival at Helsingfors.

For a raging anger filled the Ritter von Geist's heart! He had sought out the burly Prince Katkoff, who regarded failure as the only crime.

"*I have missed him!*" groaned the Ritter.

"You have let him slip through our fingers!" growled the Governor-General. "He has got away in some of the fishing-smacks or coasters. There are a hundred islands in the Finland archipelago whence he can gain the safety of foreign shores. Von Geist, you have ruined your *own* game and spoiled *mine!*"

The Master of Weissenstein listened unmoved when Prince Katkoff gruffly said: "I will take Arline Pulawy and some other friends over to Weissenstein for a week. Remain here in the palace as my guest, and do not bother Dragonoff and these people to come. Your whole work has been a blundering failure!"

But, stung by the brutality of his chief, the Ritter hastened away to telegraph to Prince Fedor Lazareff at Hapsal. Perhaps Max had doubled on his tracks!

A sudden idea possessed the angry schemer. "This fellow may have doubled back to lie *perdu* around Hapsal, within reach of his friends. I'll have Lazareff watch that daring girl Nadine Valdor, for it was she who either warned him or else aided him to escape. And the woman who baffled Olga Luboff will bear watching. The young jade, too, loves this fellow von Dornberg—a great, hulking, Swedish corporal!"

It was in the merry starlight that Prince Nicolas Katkoff brought la Comtesse Arline Pulawy to take leave of the distinguished guests gracing her roof. The old Aide-de-Camp was the soul of hospitality as he welcomed the Czar's Vicegerent.

And even Katkoff was deceived by the unconstrained manner of his secret prisoners. "They may know nothing after all!" he mused. "This von Geist has built up a mountain of smoke. A puff of common-sense blows it away."

But the Polish beauty, with her attendant ladies, keenly watched the stately Circassian. The carriages were now ready to drive the merry party across the fields directly to Weissenstein, and Katkoff artfully laughed on leaving von Geist to bear the brunt of an abject failure. Arline's star-like eyes studied the young Diana's face.

"There is the gleam of an unearthly happiness in that young beauty's eyes," she decided. "Either this will-o'-the-wisp has reached a land of safety, or the man of her first love has held her in his arms. For she is bewitched with a great happiness, lying hidden behind those dreaming eyes."

And, in a moment of separation from the gay throng, the Polish beauty glided to Aida's side. "If you need me, you will find me *loyal à la mort!*" she faltered, and then fled away, a ravishing picture of grace in action; for her hungry heart craved news of the man who was now lying wrapped in a deep sleep of exhaustion in the cabin of Angus McLeod, First Engineer of the "Hurricane."

Patkul had done his secret work well, and the hearty Scot had slapped von Dornberg's shoulder briskly as he said: "Turn in, my lad. The 'Hurricane' will put three hundred miles between you and that hell on earth before to-morrow noon!" And the winds of freedom lulled the wanderer to his first sweet sleep of weeks!

As Dragonoff went to his rest, the brave daughter of the Adighé threw her arms around him. "Ask me nothing—not a word—till I bid you speak; but he is out there on the ocean, free as the sea-bird, and a hundred miles away.

"Hush! Not a word!" cried Zenaide, as the delighted General caught her to his breast. "You must know nothing! We have Countess Marie and Nadine yet to save; and the hardest task is before us, for, believe me, Katkoff will never relent, and von Geist is a fiend from hell! Good-night! Ask me nothing more!"

Then loyal old Michel Dragonoff raised and kissed the slender white hand which had driven the dagger into Olga Luboff's heart.

As the last of the von Dornbergs watched the shades of

night wrap the eastern seas, where the distant red and green lights of the Copenhagen-bound packets gleamed out afar, a slender girl walked briskly down the deserted lane at Hapsal, bounding the Parc de Bellegarde, toward the long, low post-station, where two black-and-white banded posts and three tawdry emblazoned official signs marked the Imperial Depot for post-horses and road-wagons.

In a yard to the rear, the postilions were leading the sinewy Oestland roadsters to water, and the keeper of the station, a burly Oestlander, in shirt-sleeves, stood in the doorway, smoking his long pipe.

He never raised his eyes as Nadine Valdor, in the travelling-dress of a burgher girl, entered the doorway.

His winsome frau then arose, and dusting off the best chair, threw open the door of her neat little parlor.

Her eyes widened in astonishment as the young girl demanded the tariff for carriages and doubled post-horses. For she well knew her disguised visitor.

"I wish to go to Kegel, *grande vitesse*, and I wish the best of drivers. Do not forget that," resolutely said the young beauty, placing a slender *sac de voyage* on the table, as she nervously laid down a hundred-rouble note. "Let it be ready at once. I desire to leave forthwith." There was a look of amazement on the good frau's face.

"Are you alone, Barina?" faltered the astounded woman. "That lonely ride at night, through the forest! There are always dangers, you know."

"If you know me, then say nothing of my departure," unconcernedly said the little Baroness. "I must be at Kegel by daylight, to take the morning train to Reval."

The good woman bustled around, after receiving a ten-rouble note as a reminder of prudence, when she had signed the official receipts for the tariff for the whole voyage.

Her sharp words animated her stolid husband, and, in ten minutes, a covered light carriage, with a leather hood to turn away the rain and fog, was standing at the door.

There were four nervous horses straining on the traces as a good-humored looking lad of twenty sprang upon the box, clad in the low, curly-brimmed silk hat,

the flowing-skirted blue coat, with its silver bell-butions, of the Russian driver.

The gloom of night had already settled down as the bustling housewife finished her offerings of pillows, foot-rests, and all the minutiae of an eighty-mile continuous drive, by post, through the wild and lonely pine forests of Esthonia.

Not a word escaped Baroness Valdor's lips as, with a last look at the holy picture gleaming out above them in its corner there, lit up with a silver lamp, and flanked by the faded features of the late Czarina and the Czar's wooden countenance, the young voyager gave the order, "Drive on!" They were off with a single flourish of Ivan's whip.

She never even turned her head as the sound of clattering hoofs was heard and a horseman dashed by, at break-neck speed, his horse's hoofs striking fire from the lone granite pebbles of the roadway.

The chill of the marshes penetrated the curtains as the excited girl leaned back and fell into a half-slumber, for she had been wearied out with secret preparations.

It was not a flight, but a boldly planned answer to the Princess Zenaïde's appeals not to come to Reval under the escort of the smirking Russian spies of the steamer "Livadia." "Once that I am at the railway, I am safe," thought the frightened girl, as the dreary road led out beyond the last peasant's hut, into the wild forest, where only four post-huts, for relay horses, marked the sandy wilderness stretching to distant Kegel, eighty long miles away. It was a mad venture, and the girl's heart failed her!

"They will have my telegram from Kegel long before the Countess Marie wakes," mused Baroness Nadine. "It was the only way for me to get away without perhaps betraying the secret of Max von Dornberg's flight."

The young girl had leaped, at a single bound, into a full knowledge of all the stormy cares of Life. For, trustful and guileless in her chrysalis unfolding, she had been waked to see the fierce play of the human passions by the excitement of the past weeks.

She had been keenly on the watch against Fedor Lazareff's now insolent pretensions, since the Countess Marie had been cut down by the shock of Max's evasion.

And she had eaten of the sad fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of her ripened womanhood's charms. Though the brave-hearted Zenaide had secretly counselled her, Lazareff had easily found means to corrupt the servants in the de Bellegarde mansion.

And so, on her lonely morning walk, in the splendid loneliness of the Park, the triumphant Marechal de Noblesse had found the way and confronted her. In pouring out a tirade of threats, of ominous disclosures as to the future of the von Dornbergs, he had grasped her unwilling hand. And his breath had been hot upon her cheek. She dared not give the alarm.

"The way to peace, the one road to safety, is in my love!" he cried. "For I will save your adopted mother and your mad foster-brother. Only this can avert their ruin. Dragonoff will soon be called away to command the Caucasus. De Bellegarde is a valetudinarian, your foolish Max is a fugitive criminal, and I have the whole *gendarmarie* of the Oestland under my control.

"Katkoff and von Geist are charged with hunting down von Dornberg. If Count Max ever reaches foreign shores, there is forfeiture and attainder, beggary and exile, before them both.

"Mother and son will be deprived of their passports. Now, choose between their ruin or the safety of all! Would you cling to this dastard who fled to escape meeting me on the field of honor?

"You are all in my hands. If I denounce you now to the authorities, you will soon be cast in prison for aiding his escape, for I have the whole story of the old woman who owned the fishing-boat!"

In her desperation, Nadine Valdor cried: "Liar! Begone! I have wealth enough for all our friends, even if the Island Kingdom falls into the Crown lands. As for the old woman you speak of, bring her to the office of General Gorski to confront me! You are a liar! *There is no such woman!*" It was the bravery of her blood which held her up now.

And then, swifter than Diana's nymphs, she had passed him in her womanly disdain. It was true that the old fish-wife had been tempted with Lazareff's gold. But she had refused to speak, and had even hastened to warn the lovely young Barina.

On this lonely night in the forest, Nadine Valdor spoke several times to her young driver. His frank, honest face and respectful air disarmed her. There was no guile in his Oestland nature.

And so, she slept, wrapped in the mantle of her innocence, until the jingling bells ceased with a crash, as, at eleven o'clock, the first post change was made.

Sipping her glass of tea, the little Baroness glanced at the careworn face of the fatherly peasant who now took the reins. He was one of the smaller farmers, and glad of the three roubles so easily earned by a three-hours' night ride.

Then out, into the lonely forest again, the four half-wild horses sprang once more, and the chill night-air drove the wearied girl to the solace of the cushions and the rugs plentifully piled around her by the kindly mistress of Hapsal station.

It was a long and a lonely road. The forest-trees murmured dismally in the night-breeze, and dense black shadows lay athwart the yellowed sands of the Baltic drift. From out the woods, all the mysterious noises of the night alarmed her, for lynx and wildcat, hungry summer wolf, and the fierce brown bear roved over the pathless tracts abandoned to the course of nature, until the magic railway should press onward from Reval.

And now, Baroness Valdor knew that this modern improvement only awaited the downfall of the old Hanseatic privileges.

For then Russianizing would begin in earnest! Stations, garrisons, camps, and forts—all as planned by Nicolas, Prince Katkoff, now gayly nearing Weissenstein with his company of merry convives, making the forest arches ring with their gay songs stolen from the Tziganes and the opera bouffe. A royal convoy of Pleasure's nymphs!

It was three o'clock when the horses pulled up before the second station. There was but one more change, and then, thank God! the rosy dawn would soon bring its golden rays to light these gloomy woods. Without a word, the new driver took his seat upon the box, and lashing the fresh horses, drove away from the mean little hut, where a single blinking candle shone out through the gloom of night.

There is an ebb and flow, a diurnal variation of human energy, and in the grewsome hours "ayont the twal," suddenly aroused, the sleeper often wakes with the self-protecting thrill of the personal aureole of nerve-force.

Some tugging at Nadine Valdor's heart, brought the young girl at once into the fullest exercise of her mental powers. It flashed over her that the station-master, with his lantern, had not even once appeared. She had signed no voucher for the driver, and the invariable cup of tea had not been tendered. The new driver, sitting stern and silent, lashed the wild horses along, the frail carriage rocking from side to side. And a sudden fear possessed the terrified voyager.

An awful suggestion came to appall the frightened Baroness as they dashed down into a long hollow, fenced with mournful clumps of trees, whose arched branches encroached upon the narrowed forest driveway, cut through the stubborn pines.

"Alone, at night, here in this trackless forest, with a driver so insolent that he never even heeds my words!" For she had spoken several times to him without even a gruff response. There came a crisis which proved her imminent peril!

As the horses pulled up with a heavy jar to the carriage, the burly driver leaped from his seat and ran quickly to the head of the team.

He was busied there for a few moments, and then slowly came back to the hooded carriage.

There was but one white, far-away star shining from the pale-blue heavens above the blackened masses of the trees, and the mournful scream of a hooting owl lent its ghastly horror to this supreme moment. She saw no mercy in that pale, cold star.

But, Nadine Valdor's hand had quickly stolen into her *sac de voyage* and closed convulsively upon the handle of a pistol. Her jewels, her money, and the *articles de voyage* were there, all as planned by Zenaide, who wished her to evade the police, now eager to claim the blood-money for Max von Dornberg's arrest. The pistol she had secretly obtained when she had been dogged in the park by the insolent brute Lazareff.

The rough hand of the intruder was busied with the low-dropped leathern hood of the britska, and the easy

attitude of the animals showed that the scoundrel had tied the horses. *It was no ordinary peasant robber, then!*

And suddenly all the brave blood of her ancestry surged back to the young girl's heart. The silence was broken by a harsh voice, whose brutal menace needed no explanation:

"Get out! You must listen to me now! You are in my power at last! *We are alone, in the night, my lady!*"

It was the voice of the cowardly Lazareff, and one mental flash brought back that galloping horseman who had preceded her on the way. There was not a word spoken as the terrified girl crowded away when the strong hands clutched at her robe.

But, a woman's voice wailed out in one wild, thrilling scream, as a deafening report rang out! The red flash of the revolver showed to her the convulsed face of Fedor, Prince Lazareff, who staggered back a few steps, whirled heavily around, and throwing out his arms in a despairing clutch at the knee-deep weeds, fell prone upon his face!

With a wild plunge, the leaders snapped their halter.

As the wheels began to move, Nadine Valdor clambered over to the low driver's-seat and caught the reins.

Two hours later the station-master on the Kegel road lifted the half-dead woman from the britska, for the horses had trailed along the road and halted of their own accord at the relay station.

CHAPTER XIV.

YOUR HAND, OR HIS LIFE!

A homely remedy revived the exhausted girl at once, for the honest old station-master's vodki was a powerful reagent. "Just the old story—some love runaway," growled Ivan Ivanovitch, as the quick-witted girl murmured, "I must get on to Kegel, to catch the morning train! Hasten with the horses, and send your wife along with me. I will pay her well!"

The good woman bustled around as the delighted

Ivan received a twenty-rouble note. It was a month's wage to him! "That driver fellow of yours had a bottle of vodki. He was just too drunk and stupid to talk to you, Barina, and he has tumbled out into the road to sleep off his liquor. Never fear, he will walk back to the other station, and hold his tongue! He shall never get a cent of pay for that ride. That's the way to punish him! I know these drivers. They all drink!"

Nadine Valdor left the peasant nursing his comfortable delusion, and she drank her glass of tea in silence, for her self-protection demanded all the exercise of her faculties. There were others to be held answerable for a new breach of Russian laws!

It seemed as if the mills of the gods were grinding very rapidly! But one desire lingered in her heart. It was to reach Kegel, telegraph to General Dragonoff, and then stand at bay at Reval and fight for her rights against the whole world. The mad hand of lust had been laid upon her!

The fresh team trotted cheerfully along, and the peasant dame, with her simple chatter, was a relief from the ghastly thoughts which thronged upon the excited girl.

They sped along merrily, and the faint streakings of the dawn showed them the cultivated grounds opening out into the smiling pastures encircling the pretty little railway station of Kegel, midway between Baltischport and Reval.

Baroness Valdor had dozed, leaning her tired head upon the matronly bosom of the peasant, and she awoke at last, with a cry of delight, as the good dame joyously said, "Angel lamb, you have had a slumber sent by the good God! Here we are at Kegel, and you have a full half-hour to take your ease, send off your telegraph messages, and catch the train!"

The bright sunlight was gleaming cheerfully on the laden fruit-trees, the pretty gardens, and the picturesque wooden villas as the tired horses drew up before the railway station. With a supreme effort she controlled herself.

The station-master's wife leaped out and soon brought a sleepy-looking telegraph clerk, cap in hand, to await the pleasure of the young Barina, who had pressed a

fifty-rouble note into the hand of her grateful companion.

"What is this?" timidly cried the woman, as she removed all the slender belongings of the Baroness to the dainty little waiting-room of the first-class passengers in the great square-timbered station-house, where the climbing vines with their rich blossoms held the browned, fragrant cedar logs. "I found it on the floor of the carriage!"

Without a word, the trembling Baroness dropped the double-action revolver in her still unclasped travelling-bag. It must be hidden—but, where?

The train had already whistled before the good woman took her leave, and, gazing down the forest road, Baroness Nadine Valdor shuddered lest she should see, spurting on, the aroused gendarmes who were now scouring the woods below Kegel to find the traces of fugitive murderers!

For the sleepy mail-carrier hastening toward Hapsal had piously crossed himself when his horses shied at the grisly thing lying there with its stiffened, outstretched hands!

The chattering birds and the curious squirrels played around the senseless and stiffened corpse of what had been, but four hours ago, a man, proud in all the lust of life, his throbbing veins filled with the arrogant blood of the reckless patrician!

"This has been murder!" gasped the frightened driver, as he saw the blood-stains on the dead noble's breast.

And, as the astounded peasant dared not raise the corpse, he drove hastily on to the station where the cowardly change of costume had been effected.

Lying in a corner of the stable, a rude postilion, sodden with vodka, was roughly kicked into sensible discourse by the enraged station-keeper.

The young clown sullenly warded off the beating.

"That fellow who put his horse up here stole my coat and hat, and then drove away with the lady! I was afraid to tell you! But, we have his horse—a splendid one, too!"

He skulked away and hid his handful of ten-rouble bills in a cranny of the old stone stable, while the sta-

tion-keeper roused some peasants and then went away with a cart to bring back the body of the slain. The sly postilion's lips were craftily sealed now!

When the search party arrived at the scene of the killing, they found a mounted gendarme already on guard beside the corpse.

"There has been foul murder done here!" cried the rural policeman. "This is the body of Prince Fedor Lazareff, the Marechal de Noblesse! I saw him at the great ball in Hapsal! Take the corpse to the station. Touch nothing! I shall ride over and report this to General Gorski."

"Let no one leave your station, for all of you will be summoned as witnesses!"

And so, the body of the man whom Fate had paid off in such strange coin, was borne back to a squalid hut, lying upon folded horse-blankets, with its staring eyes glaring stonily, in the last message which those cruel eyes would ever send out on earth—the unread story of an interrupted villainy, the olden plot of the strong against the weak!

The curse of Cain shone out in the scowl which had stiffened in the lines of that agonized face, for the random bullet had pierced the villain's heart!

At the splendid railway station in Reval, General Dragonoff's glittering equipage awaited the pale-faced girl who tottered into the strong arms of the Princess Zenaide. There was a cry of welcome, a moan of relief, and then, the little Baroness sank senseless in the arms of the astonished old veteran.

Four days later, the bright-eyed Circassian was called away from Nadine's bedside, where she lay tossing in a fever.

The strong-hearted Princess merely bowed as she passed the mighty Prince Nicolas Katkoff, who entered the library of Villa Pulawy with General Dragonoff, who was now as cold and frosty in his dignity as if he were engaged in the first *pour parlors* of a duel to the death.

But, Serge Lemacheffsky drew the blushing girl aside into a nook of the music-room.

"Read this, my own darling!" he whispered, as he seized her hands and covered them with burning kisses.

"The agents of the 'Hurricane' sent it open to me, for you."

The glowing girl read the lines between her happy tears. For, never had the printed telegraph slip borne more joyous tidings!

"Goods sent by the Princess Zenaide were safely delivered in Hull. Address all directions to the care of our London house."

"He is beyond the reach of trouble now!" thankfully sighed Lemacheffsky. "But, tell me of this new horror as to Prince Lazareff! There are some strange, flying rumors!"

"Katkoff has brought the Countess Pulawy and her cousin Casimir back. They are at the Hôtel Petersbourg, in your old rooms! He is going over to Hapsal to direct General Gorski in the investigation of Fedor Lazareff's murder!"

With her finger on her lip, Princess Aida gave her lover a glance of love which blinded him to all the world but those pleading eyes, triumphant in their thrall over him.

"Come and dine with us at seven. Max is safe, thank God! Do not linger now! Listen—General Dragonoff has been tendered the command of the Caucasus, with head-quarters at Tiflis! They say that Katkoff is to be soon relieved and sent to Cracow! I have a plan, Serge, which will disarm all these prying spies!"

"What is it, my angel?" whispered Serge.

"Your promotion to Colonel could give you command of a regiment in the Caucasus. There are four regiments of the Guards there! Dragonoff goes in a few days to consult with the Czarewitch, and if you tell him all—you could—" She hesitated, and a sudden rosy glow illumined her delicate beauty.

"Tell me!" cried Serge, a new-born hope springing up in his soul. He was heartily weary of all the petty duplicity of a staff officer's unworthy calling.

"You could marry me there, and lead a soldier's life with me, in our mountains, and learn to love them for my sake! It is the land of Love and Life and Liberty! *My Caucasus!*" She was entrancing as she stood there with open arms!

"I shall throw myself upon General Dragonoff's

kindness, you darling witch!" whispered Lemacheffsky, as the sound of angry voices reached them from the library.

With a single stride, Serge Lemacheffsky had reached the outer waiting-room, while Zenaide, her heart thrilled with the happy tidings, hastened away to bring joy to the heart of the white-faced invalid who was now the subject of the bitterest quarrel of Dragonoff's whole career.

There had been little ceremony in Nicolas Katkoff's rude *abordage* of his old friend and comrade in arms.

His equipage waited at the door, with an escort of honor, and several staff officers lingered around the gardens of the dreamy house of love and luxury.

"I am here to demand, General Dragonoff," said the Prince, "an explanation from your ward, the Baroness Nadine Valdor, as to how Fedor, Prince Lazareff, met his death!

"She drove in the post-chaise alone into the station, and his dead body was found, lying deserted by the road, with a bullet through the heart!"

Dragonoff bowed formally, and rejoiced now that the little Baroness had dropped the revolver into the deep waters of a muddy river between Kegel and Reval, from the opened train window.

The hero of Shipka Pass waved his visitor to a chair, but Katkoff stiffly inclined his head. It was a declaration of war!

"I will answer you, *mon Prince*," calmly replied Dragonoff, "when you explain to me why this dead villain was found dressed in a royal postilion's official garb! It seems to *me* that *you* should have General Gorski arrest the whole force of the post-road employés between Hapsal and the place of this cur's death!"

"As Governor-General of the Province, I order you to bring your ward to Hapsal with me on the 'Livadia' forthwith! Out of respect for your rank alone, I have postponed her arrest!" growled Nicolas Katkoff, with a dangerous glance of his tiger-like eyes.

"I shall be obliged to refuse you," firmly said General Dragonoff, his tall figure stretched to its last inch, and a deadly look coming into his eyes. "You have bullied

me long enough in this matter! I will accompany you to Hapsal and bring Madame la Comtesse von Dornberg here on her way to St. Petersburg to ask a special audience of the Czar. As for the young Baroness—she shall not stir an inch!”

And then Prince Katkoff forgot himself. “I say that she shall!” he roared. “You are under my jurisdiction here, and the consequences will be on your own head. I shall arrest the Baroness Valdor, and open a public inquiry into the whole matter of the reported accident to Olga Luboff, the flight of Max von Dornberg, and the death of the faithful Prince Lazareff! His evidence, with that of—” the enraged man hesitated.

“The Ritter von Geist!” satirically interrupted General Dragonoff.

“—would have convicted the parties who have organized the base attempt to destroy the Czar’s nearest heirs in one awful crime—the averted crime of the Bathing Pavilion,” angrily resumed Katkoff.

“Von Geist is a liar!” said General Dragonoff. “Your blundering Gorski deserves to be dismissed, and you were absent pleasuring, with a summer court around you, instead of attending to your duty!” The old veteran was coldly cruel now.

“You shall regret this!” roared Katkoff, laying his hand on his sword.

With a gesture of majestic dignity, the hero of Shipka Pass calmly said:

“You waste words, Monsieur le Prince Katkoff! I have just been honored by the Czar with the command of the Caucasus. That alone removes me from your personal control! And, as for your threats, you are soldier enough to know that I cannot notice them until I have obeyed my sovereign! But,” he icily said, “I will give you such satisfaction, at my first moment of liberty, as the case demands!”

The old General struck the table with his fist. “I find your friendship to be a sham, your hospitality a snare, and your honor a myth! Dare to interfere with the Countess von Dornberg or my ward and you shall find me in your path, even sword in hand!”

Prince Katkoff writhed in his useless rage. The dauntless old General’s eyes blazed as he said:

"Now, sir, I shall demand an open investigation by the Procurateur-General and the proper authority, General Gorski, as to how a Marechal de Noblesse was found, disguised as an Imperial post employé, engaged in an attempt to terrorize an innocent girl of high rank! How he met his death, I do not care! *I know how he would have met it* if I had ever gazed upon his cowardly face again! I would have strangled him with my own hands, like a mad dog! You dare not defend such a cowardly dog, and, you know it, too!"

And then, with a firm tread, the old aristocrat crossed the room and held the door open with his shaking hand.

"The carriage of the Governor-General is at the door!" he said, grimly. "I shall personally visit the Countess Pulawy and pay for the shelter we have had here! For, I doubt if the lady has loaned you her villa for a state prison. I will meet you, sir, at Hapsal!"

There was no possible answer to this unmistakable action but a departure.

With a face ashen with rage, the Prince crossed the threshold of the villa where he had met the gravest humiliation of his life.

When the staff of the enraged Prince clattered away to the citadel, General Dragonoff hastily sought the presence of the Princess Zenaide.

"The gauntlet has been thrown down, my poor child!" he sadly said. "It is a fight now to the death, and, an open one! I shall send the 'Aslauga' at once to Hapsal. I have already telegraphed to St. Petersburg for my staff officers, and Colonel and Mrs. Apraxine arrive to-night."

"Madame Apraxine will take charge of you and Nadine until I return with Countess Marie. Then, face to face, we will have it out, for I shall appeal directly to the Czar! But, we must not be separated!"

"I shall call on the Graf in Pulawy at once, and tell her that on the arrival of Madame von Dornberg we will choose a new residence."

"Beware of intimacy with her during my absence! Great God! How can I break the news of Max's utter disgrace to Countess Marie! I have letters by courier this morning from de Bellegarde. Countess Marie has regained her mind, and yet, is still so feeble that any new shock might kill her!"

"Joy never kills!" cried Zenaide. "Tell her to say boldly that Max von Dornberg is now in England upon important family affairs! That is all. They can prove nothing! Read this telegram!"

She handed him the precious document brought by Serge Lemacheffsky. With happy eyes, the old veteran read the news. He had listened to Zenaide's darkly hinted explanation of the evasion of Max.

"I spirited him away on the 'Hurricane' as a stoker, having paid the chief engineer, a canny Scot, to protect him! You must know nothing! Wait till the very last, and then I will confound both Katkoff and this human devil von Geist! Bring the Countess here, for Nadine and I will tell her, what you must never know!" The General shook his head in an agony of doubts and fears.

"The risks of such an official inquiry are great! There is this revolutionary movement among the Oestland noblesse!" sorrowfully said the loyal Dragonoff. "Conspiracy seldom succeeds! Gentlemen should always fight in the open!"

"I will take all the risks!" proudly cried the Circasian. "I have nothing to lose, for I have even placed myself in pawn for Max's life and Countess Marie's safety! You can do two things, but, after that, wait for me—to confound them at the last! Bid the Countess von Dornberg warn all her friends of the Baltic noblesse to preserve a watchful quiet!"

"I am no conspirator, but, they should bend to this storm, not face it! Melikoff will grind out all resistance in blood! He is the pitiless Asiatic!"

"As for this bewitching Polish Countess, the summer queen, Arline Pulawy, tell her that Max and Max's mother are in mortal danger!"

"She will know what to do, for Katkoff is her slave, and she alone can counteract the Ritter von Geist's schemes! Her cousin Casimir is the go-between for the Prince and the Ritter, and she dominates the pleasure-loving Pole.

"Stay, give her this ring, and tell her to act for herself to screen our friends.

"For what heart she has, has been strangely stirred by Max von Dornberg! You know the Polish woman is

half angel, half devil! Max owns the better part! Trust to me, for you must be able to go to the Czar and Czarewitch with clean hands! Let Katkoff himself make the game!

"I will have something to say, something to show. But, only at the last supreme moment! Trust to me! They shall not conquer!"

Filled with a strange new faith, General Dragonoff drove into Reval, and his face was lit with a dawning hope as he returned from a brief visit to Arline Pulawy. The Polish beauty listened unmoved to the General's statement of his sense of duty as regarded the Count's enforced hospitality.

"We are a homeless race, General Dragonoff, the outcast children of Poland, but, I pray you, tarry yet under my roof! It is the safest place in Reval! Tell the one who sent this ring that I shall not fail her at the last moment! I shall beg you to allow me to see Madame von Dornberg on her arrival, for I must be near her, to aid that gallant girl who has been the one friend in need! I know the Russians never trust a Pole, General Dragonoff," said the lonely woman. "*But, I am no longer a Pole!*"

"The wide world is my home! Blackened ashes mark the site of the Château Pulawy now, and the plough to-day turns up the mouldered bones of our bravest, left by the Russian wolves of the battle-field! I have nothing to gain, nothing to lose!" she smiled through her tears. "If *you* do not trust me, *she* will!"

The knightly old man bent over the hand of the summer queen.

"For Max's sake!" he said, and her face was flooded with a curious glow as she murmured, "For Max's sake!" And then, she turned away to hide the secret shining in her hopeless eyes.

"It seems there is a Polish heart, after all," mused the old man, with tears in his eyes.

The new Commander of the Caucasus drove to the landing and was astonished at the filial courtesy of the young Deputy Port-Admiral. "I have orders to waive all formalities for the 'Aslauga,'" courteously said Serge Lemacheffsky; "and I will escort her to sea in my steam-cutter and send a port officer down in charge with your crew."

"As I have been honored with an invitation to dine with you at seven, if you will send your crew aboard, I will report to you to-night! So I will escort you to the evening train myself."

"I wonder," mused the Czar's aide-de-camp, "if this fine young fellow smuggled von Dornberg away? Aida is a witch, and she has him in the net!"

When the young officer escorted General Dragonoff to his carriage, he stood there with his cap lifted, a martial figure, his face lit up with the morning sunshine of life.

"I am on the eve of my promotion, General," he said, with a sudden impulse; "I should like to be assigned to a regiment of the Guards in the Caucasus. I would be honored in serving under you. My Colonelcy comes next month. If you would apply for me, I would surely obtain it. I shall beg the Princess Zenaide to ask your kindness. She goes to Tiflis with you!"

The old hero reached out his hand, for the imploring eyes of the young fellow told the whole story of his self-surrender.

"Plevna and Shipka are not far distant," good-humoredly answered Dragonoff. "I will speak to the Princess, my son. I presume that she will approve."

And he nodded then to his driver, for the steeds were impatient.

"Aida is a pretty good strategist," laughed Dragonoff. "She is organizing my army for me! I fancy this brave lad has the pretty Circassian in pawn." He could read between the lines of life, and the breath of its autumnal morning swept over him again. He pondered long over Zenaide's last words.

"Can Marie have led her son on, *herself*, into some foolish reactionary scheme?"

He was never undeceived, for, long before the special courier-post brought him to Hapsal, the Baron Waldeck, Count Solms, and Graf von Mollwitz had informed the Lady of the Isles of the changing of all the passwords of the Chapters of the Brotherhood of the East.

They had dispersed *sine die*, for the abortive scheme at Hapsal had brought home to everyone the dangers now menacing their defenceless heads.

"It is useless to struggle against Russia's centralization!" sighed Waldeck. "The Hanseatic privileges are a thing of the past!"

And so, even General Gorski could not pick up a trace of any connection between the noblesse of the Oestland shores and von Geist's clumsy subterfuge.

"Damn him!" growled Gorski. "He must now go on and swear the whole thing on them! We will pull down the Island Kingdom, at any rate. And, I now see my way to reach Nadine Valdor's side."

The burly Police-General had dropped all detailed inquiry into Prince Lazareff's death upon a telegraphed cipher dispatch that Prince Katkoff would deal personally with it.

For the shame of Lazareff's midnight plot was too great to face the light of public judicial inquiry, even in the hands of Loris Melikoff's blind tools. The horrible plot of a brute against a defenceless maiden's honor!

As the light-hearted Serge Lemacheffsky towed the "Aslauga" out to sea, and cast her off far beyond the outer sand-spits, he laughed at the success of a little ruse which he had practised upon the artful von Geist.

The young Deputy Port-Admiral had been called that morning to a secret conference with Prince Katkoff and the Ritter von Geist.

"It seems that these mysterious Brothers of the East have more wit and nerve than all our people," growled the Governor-General. "Here is Gorski completely at sea, the secret-service governess, Olga Luboff, mysteriously drowned, and who knows but that the Prince Lazareff too, was artfully assassinated.

"Not a jot of evidence can be procured against the Oestland nobles to warrant a general repression. The fact is, the whole population seem to aid and screen them. And the two gatherings on the Island of Worms, the home-coming of the young Count, the great hunting-party, were simply meetings of conspirators on a grand scale.

"They are traitors like the Poles, who carry on all their nefarious schemes under cover of the Roman Catholic formalities of funerals, weddings, christenings, confirmations, and even the pastoral visits of the clergy. I would force 'one law, one language, one flag, one creed,' on these captured provinces, if I only had my will!" He was stirred to the very depths of his tiger-heart now.

They had discussed the vain search of all the shipping and the environs of Hapsal, when a man clad in fisher's garb was ushered into Prince Katkoff's ante-room. There was a glow of triumph on his face.

"We have him surely now!" he cried. "Von Dornberg has been seen on the island! He is hiding in the huts of the villagers. One of my secret-service men, who has cruised around the Island by my orders, reports that a boat from Spint Head landed a couple of men last week. I see it all. Someone must have warned the fugitive. He got away to the south shore, and so has harked back to the deserted island."

"I told you he was not in Reval," firmly said Serge Lemacheffsky. "If he did come in on the dismantled brig, he would steal out at once. Blood is thicker than water with these simple Esthonians."

The silence was broken by Prince Katkoff, who cried, energetically:

"I have it now! I will allow Dragonoff to bring the Countess away. You and I and Gorski can organize a descent upon the island the very day that the old General brings her away on the 'Aslauga.' I will have a half-dozen vessels ready, with a squad of soldiers in each.

"The 'Livadia' can run out at dark and drop their boats all around the island by daybreak. Then, at dawn of day, a chain of sentries will be drawn around the whole coast-line. A company landed from the 'Livadia' shall sweep over the island. We have him now at our mercy!" Von Geist was radiant with joy.

"Do you think that von Dornberg fled to avoid meeting Lazareff in a duel?" gravely interjected Lemacheffsky.

"There is some arch-conspirator in that nest!" roared Katkoff. "Whether this Circassian captive, the young Count, or the proud mother, I know not; but I will know soon! God help the guilty one!"

"I shall not antagonize the old General, for he has been signally honored; but, when they are all here, and I have the young heir in chains, the story will be wrung out of the women very soon. My policy now is politeness, until I strike. Then the final punishment is for Melikoff to mete out. *It will be Death!*"

Before the sun set, the "Livadia" glided out of the harbor, and Katkoff departed to arrange at Hapsal his descent upon the hitherto unviolated kingdom of the channel.

The Prince moodily eyed the "Aslauga" bearing bravely along, under full sail, toward the crags of Spint Head, and he grimly ordered the return of the salute of the falcon flag by lowering his private signal.

"I'll have that flag trailed in the dust!" he growled, for even in his rage he had some *amour propre*. He dared not confide to von Geist the open defiance of the brave old hero of Shipka Pass.

There never was such a dinner of delightful surprises as the little festival in the Château Pulawy, whereat the Baroness Nadine Valdor appeared to grace the table and welcome Captain Lemacheffsky.

With her eagle eyes demurely downcast, the Princess Aida narrowly watched General Dragonoff until he drove to the station to bring Colonel Apraxine's wife to be the official mistress of the villa until the arrival of the Countess.

The name of Max von Dornberg was never mentioned, but the General scored his little point.

"You will find out all about Tiflis from Madame Apraxine, Captain Lemacheffsky," said the kindly veteran. "I shall ask your kindness to come here daily during my absence, and see what you can do to aid Apraxine in cheering these young ladies. For it will be a week before we can return. You may change your mind about the Caucasus. I shall send a staff officer back to Petersburg on my return, and if you wish the assignment then, you shall have it."

"*He will not change his mind*," significantly said the taciturn Princess Zenaide. "Captain Lemacheffsky has promised to teach me to ride, and I shall insist upon a full regimental escort. For, I propose to explore my own country."

"We will regard it as all settled then!" cheerily cried Dragonoff. "I will apply for you at Hapsal, and you will have your order relieving you, so that you can go down with us."

A little hand stole under the table to meet Lemacheffsky's tender grasp. "You are the dearest of all Gen-

erals!" the captive maiden cried, and, when the two gentlemen drove away, the two happy beauties fell into each other's arms.

Three days later General Dragonoff was astonished to find Madame la Comtesse von Dornberg in brilliant health. He never knew that old Elia, the butler, had stolen away to Hapsal on the first train after the arrival of the English cablegram, and carried a message from Zenaide which effected an instant cure.

Two weeks later, the grave-faced Ritter von Geist sat in the shaded drawing-rooms of Arline Pulawy in the Hôtel Petersbourg at Reval.

There was a table between them, which betokened the little *tête-à-tête* feast so dear to lovers; but, on the one side, the bewitching woman in her rose-colored morning gown, guarded her entrenched position with every soft art of Eve; on the other, the Master of Weissenstein reserved all the reports of his secret spies as a lever to terrify the woman who had been his tool. The last act of the drama was coming on now.

Wary, seductive, and cunning, the lovely Lithuanian silently listened to von Geist's story of the abortive descent upon the lonely island, and the consequent rage of the Oestland nobles at the forcible armed occupation of a hitherto sacred Baltic sovereignty.

On the Katharinenthal, in Reval, the family circle of the von Dornbergs was now complete, save for the absent son and heir, and from Riga to Helsingfors, from Arensburg to Reval, the border-side rang with the growing mysteries of *l'affaire Dornberg*.

The bells tolled midnight before the cautious fencing of the two distrustful enemies brought them into open opposition. Von Geist threw off the mask at last!

"There is but one way to justify Katkoff's forcible occupation of the Island—to discover the whereabouts of young von Dornberg. You are needy; Casimir is poor. My own evidence alone does not bring the Countess under the ban. You have secretly visited her before our return.

"Nay, do not deny it! You are now on even friendly terms. For your *beaux yeux* this love-sick fool braved a death by Katkoff's pistol. You shall work out my will! Gain their confidence.

"You will thus ensure Katkoff's brilliant promotion. You will make me at once the Governor-General of Esthonia, and the Island Kingdom will soon be swept into the general territory of Russia. The island is worth four millions of silver roubles.

"You shall have gold—you shall be well paid. Casimir, too, shall be advanced, protected, enriched. This Dragonoff dares now to brave Katkoff openly, and you must aid me to trap Marie von Dornberg. Only through that Circassian devil can Nadine Valdor and the Countess be brought defenceless into our hands.

"*Refuse me, and—*" his brows were black with the scowl of hate.

"And what?" stammered the frightened woman. "You would not betray me now to Nicolas Katkoff's rage! You would not betray a defenceless woman to his tiger-like revenge! You brought Max von Dornberg into my life. Remember your own oath at Weissenstein! I was to help you up. I am innocent of the blood of this woman Luboff, of Lazareff's death. You know it!"

Von Geist towered over her in a spasm of rage. "Katkoff will have his vengeance for these happenings. It is no time to speak of light summer loves—of the oaths made over the wine-cup. If you will not save me, then you must save yourself. Will you do my bidding?"

The woman, standing at bay, turned upon him at last.

"Beware that in dragging down the house we do not all fall together! I cannot betray the son through the love of a mother's heart! Spare me, Karl!"

With an oath, the Ritter von Geist cast off her clinging arms, and then strode out into the night.

"Polish devil!" he muttered. "You shall pay me for all!"

When his foot died away on the stair, Arline Pulawy sprang to her feet.

"There is yet time! I will save her! She shall know of this villain's schemes to rob her of her inheritance and to doom her only son to the gallows—the last of the von Dornbergs!"

And so, Arline Pulawy, with a bosom stirred then by woman's strangest inconstant floods, longed for the dawn, that she might save her lover's life.

The thought of the future never chilled for a moment

the purpose of her glowing heart. "He shall not find me!" she cried. "I have Casimir to aid me. Welcome the chill of exile and poverty, but not, this last disgrace."

It was afternoon of the next day when the Countess Marie von Dornberg sprang to her feet as an attendant announced the Ritter von Geist.

There was a sudden movement of the woman who had lingered by her side all the morning, for General Dragonoff and Colonel Apraxine were closeted at the Citadel, with the Procureur-General.

Madame Apraxine had convoyed the young beauties out upon the bay, under the escort of Captain Lemacheffsky, whose orders of relief were resting upon his heart.

The prayer of General Dragonoff had been granted, and a regiment of Guards awaited the new commander under the shadows of the mighty Demavend. And the whole circle panted to escape from Katkoff's iron hand.

"There is a trap in this!" whispered Arline Pulawy. "He has spies set upon you! Else how would he seek the hour when all your household—every friend—is absent? He comes from Katkoff. Not here! Receive him in the music-room. There is a little cabinet adjoining, where I can hear all, and, through the draped curtains of the niche, see him plainly.

"Listen to him, let him tell you all his mind, and later you shall tell General Dragonoff all. Remember, do not repulse him! For, he thinks you to be alone."

And then she led her guest into the music-room. "*Here*," she pointed, as she dragged a fauteuil in range.

There was the hush of a haunting sorrow pictured on the face of the Lady of the Isles, as Karl von Geist stood silently before her. He was determined to carry his point at last by one bold assault upon the defenceless mother's heart.

With silent dignity, the stately woman pointed to a seat by her side, and waited for her secret foe to unveil himself.

He struck brutally, and with a crushing directness.

"I come to you, Marie," he slowly said, "with news which has been long kept from you by false friends who seek your final ruin. Your Island Kingdom is now garrisoned by a battalion of troops, and a decree of confisca-

tion will be at once entered against your whole family if the Procureur-General convenes the council at the Citadel." It was the downfall of the flag of the falcon and the three crowns.

The Lady of the Isles sprang to her feet, but the rustling of a silken curtain recalled the prayers of her strange champion in hiding.

"Listen!" the cold schemer cried, seizing her hand. "Unroll the scroll of the past. Look back to the days when I loved you, when I swore that you should be mine! I speak to you as to the woman whom I loved, the one whom I love still.

"There is but one safety for you. Your son has been made the victim of the vilest arts, the low deceits of Katkoff's creatures.

"He has wound a web of criminal recklessness around him, and my evidence alone can save him—can prevent his final proscription, his utter ruin, and the death of your family as recognized noblesse.

"There is but little time. Katkoff's promotion, his tenure of office here, his whole future depends upon promptly avenging the deaths of Olga Luboff and the unfortunate Lazareff.

"My hand alone can unravel the knot of Fate—can stay this human tiger. Dragonoff is powerless. He and de Bellegarde are already suspected.

"General Gorski is my confidante. He looks to me as the future Governor-General, and he controls all the evidences as to the escape of Max from the ball, the death of the Luboff woman, and the affair of Lazareff.

"If I do not hold his hand, the Princess Zenaide and Baroness Valdor will be detained to answer for what you may not know, the criminality which will confiscate both the Valdor and von Dornberg estates.

"And Katkoff's meanest creature, this Polish adventuress, into whose summer villa you have been lured, will knot the rope around your brave son's neck. He grovels at her feet, and for Katkoff's diamonds she will betray your hunted son, for he lurks here near her. It is through her wiles alone that he has been so far protected from arrest. But, Delilah will always betray Samson. *It is her trade.*"

Behind the curtained niche, with a choking throb,

a woman swore an oath which was sealed with the wild throbbing of her outraged heart.

"What would you have me do?" faltered the Countess von Dornberg. "You, Karl von Geist, the head of the new Brotherhood! You, my guest, who begged of me the oblivion of your wicked past!"

He sprang to her side. "I want you, Marie von Dornberg; *I want you as my wife!* For your sake I will turn away the whole tide of misery from your door. There is no help for you but in my arms. Say the word, and after a year the proscription of Max von Dornberg shall be recalled. And, I will guard you and yours with my life!"

"The cause for which we plotted?" she slowly whispered, recoiling a step in her horror, as if some loathsome, slimy creature were at her side.

"Is lost, lost forever! This Polish serpent who has been Katkoff's plaything and dupe led Max out beyond our lines into many mad, treasonable attempts.

"Gorski spied upon your son, and has traced his connection unerringly with the affairs at Hapsal. That crazy plot to destroy the two Grand Dukes and their innocent children! Say the word and I will expose her treachery to her enraged lover. Katkoff will visit his wrath upon her. *She will disappear forever!*" It was a coward's revenge!

"And, Serge Maximoff, your letter to me—your leadership of this dangerous cult of the Brotherhood of the East?" slowly said Marie von Dornberg, her eyes dilating with horror, as her fulsome lover pressed closer to her.

"Listen, Marie!" he cried, losing all prudence. "There is already the overshadowings of a change here. Say the word! Be mine! Open your arms to me! I will be called away to St. Petersburg. I will have Loris Melikoff transfer Prince Katkoff to Cracow. There is a new provincial vacancy there. Gorski shall be called off to the Neva by telegraph. Go away and meet me secretly at St. Petersburg. The inquiry will be delayed. I will see that this Polish woman vanishes!"

"She lured your son to Weissenstein, even in my absence. I will be named Governor-General of the Oestland, for I can betray the whole noblesse to Loris Meli-

koff. You shall see my name gazetted as Governor-General, and then Max shall be allowed to return.

"Gorski looks to me to advance his fortunes at court. He wishes to be made Commander of the forces, and I can hold him in my iron hand. His lips are sealed forever then."

The Countess pressed her hands upon her aching heart.

"And the others? My fellow-nobles?" faltered Marie von Dornberg.

"They must make terms with the new government officials. You have yourself to save. Think of Max! I have not told you all. *It is your hand or his life!* I will hold off my hand, but only until you have reflected. If you dare to whisper a word to a living soul, I shall show you the power that rests in my sole control now, for the warrants for you and the two young women are already here in my keeping. Katkoff dare not act without me.

"I am invincibly armed with all the dread power of the Third Section. You scorned me once—you dare not brave me longer! In my arms alone is there a haven of safety for you."

The sobbing woman clasped his arms in a vain appeal for mercy. And, von Geist turned his stony face away!

"To-night, at twelve, in the summer-house, in the garden, I will await your decision. There are spies, armed men, police, and Cossacks already watching every avenue to these grounds. Come to me with your decision, and, *come alone*; for, at daybreak, my men will close in around this villa. Dragonoff has driven Katkoff to fury, and he only pants for a sure revenge upon him.

"It is for your life, for your son's life, now, and both are in my keeping. You hold both the seals of Love and Hate! Break the one which seems best to you!"

The long path of duplicity was made clear to her at last. It flashed over Marie von Dornberg's mind that she had aided to betray the designs of the Oestland nobles into the hands of the artful wretch. And she knew that the "Twelve" of Presburg were simply the creation of Loris Melikoff's cruel spy.

When von Geist stole away, Marie von Dornberg sank senseless on a divan.

"This tryst, at midnight, shall be kept!" cried Arline Pulawy, as she bent over the fainting woman. "Casimir shall watch this coward until he gets an answer—the answer he deserves!"

CHAPTER XV.

"THESE ARE THE SCARS OF SHIPKA! THEY SHOULD NOT PLEAD IN VAIN!"

When Marie, Countess von Dornberg, opened her eyes, she saw bending over her the gentle face of Nadine Valdor. The poor hunted woman shuddered, and then covered her face with her hands, while her foster-child vainly tried to win the secret of the new heart-agony.

"Max," she whispered, with her delicate hands pressed to her throbbing breast.

"Be comforted, my dear child," faltered Marie, now broken in spirit. "I am the only victim. Max is safe! But, let me think—let me think!"

The suffering woman saw at last how skilfully von Geist had led her on into an impenetrable snare! The odious secret of his early pursuit, the active and passive betrayal of the whole Oestland, the leading of her headlong son blindly into a web of crime!

And now she dared not tell the truth to Michel Dragonoff, her only friend, for poor Biren de Bellegarde was soon to be accused of harboring conspirators!

"It is the Judas work of the paid bloodhound, the spy working downward, not upward!"

"He, the liberator, is Loris Melikoff's friend! And I dare not even look my son in the face, for he can lie, and I can not disprove him!" Marie had trapped herself, and the gates had closed upon her!

In the corner tower-room overlooking the now yeasty Baltic, where Zenaide sought communion with the stars, the Grafine Arline held a desperate council of war with the bright-eyed daughter of Schamyl.

"Zenaide," said the Polish woman, "we are both waifs on the highway of Life! I am a stormy petrel on a lonely sea, and you are homeless, nameless, and an

exile from your gallant mountain kingdom! But, the honor of the Czar is pledged that you shall live always unstained in a golden cage!

"I have nothing left to lose! You are young, beautiful, and, *innocent!*" the adventuress cried, with streaming eyes.

"My country is dead! Its daughters have been sold to shame! If I ever loved, if aught of womanhood still lingers with me, you shall know of it later! It rests with you alone now to save the Countess von Dornberg!"

The Circassian sprang to her feet with flashing eyes.

"I would die for her!" cried Aida, throwing her arms around her soiled sister's panting bosom.

The Polish beauty grasped Zenaide's hands.

"Do not leave Marie von Dornberg for an instant, until after midnight. She must not go forth! Tell Nadine and the brave old Dragonoff nothing!"

"But, stay at her side! Restrain her, *even by force*, from going out to keep the midnight tryst with the cowardly dog! After I leave you, ask no one of my fate!"

"I go now to Prince Katkoff! The morning will bring freedom to the Countess, and, I shall be far away! I go now to Marie von Dornberg to bid her trust to me! Remember, silence—the silence of the grave—as to me!"

"I have a servant's cloak and white shawl! I will take a market-place ivostchik, and be soon lost to the crowd! You must remember your last promise!"

"The Countess is not to leave this house!"

"*I swear it!*" brokenly murmured the bold Circassian, touched with the woman's agony.

"Tell Max," Arline sobbed, "that he must not forget me! For love, for love's own sake, would have made me another woman! Oh, God! If I had only known him—before—before—I sold my soul!"

She was gone, having drawn the proud girl's head down and kissed her stainless sister on the brow with trembling lips.

Five minutes later, Aida saw a woman's form gliding swiftly away through the shrubbery, and Nadine came to her friend, winged by fear.

"Come to her! The Polish woman is gone, and Marie is calling for you! What new sorrow drags us down?"

There was a stern and silent man chafing vainly in his long delay at the Hôtel Petersbourg, over whose threshold the light foot of Arline Pulawy never passed again. "I will give her one more chance—just one more!" growled von Geist, as he knocked the billiard-balls about in the café of the one Reval hostelry frequented by the officers and nobles.

He was powerless to put off General Gorski and his party of officers who, entering, claimed their sometime host for the delights of cards and the wine-cup.

"The very devil's loose in Reval," muttered Gorski. "There is Katkoff and old Dragonoff at the Citadel, each with their staffs around them, fighting and quarrelling like Bazaine and his generals over the surrender of Metz!"

"There seems to be no head or tail to the government here now! You and I must act as soon as this old foggy Dragonoff has been hustled off to St. Petersburg.

"For now is your time! Why don't you go up to St. Petersburg yourself, see Melikoff, get your order superseding Katkoff, and have me named Commander of the forces! Then, we could bag all our birds at leisure!"

"You are right, Gorski!" growled the Ritter von Geist. "I have an old score to pay off here. My books will all be closed to-morrow, and I will follow your advice! Some secret fear of Dragonoff seems to paralyze the Prince Katkoff! Is he afraid to fight in the open? It may be that his many accounts are entangled. He has lived here in 'princely splendor.'"

The burly General laughed viciously. "You mean la Pulawy?"

"Her own bright Wickedness, and others!" glumly said von Geist. "The Governor-General has been burning the candle at both ends in more ways than one!"

As the wine-glasses were emptied to the "Czar," Gorski whispered, "Come and dine with me at the Maison des Tête-Noires. I will tell you what Katkoff's adjutant has told me! Lemacheffsky is relieved! He has his Colonelcy of the Guards, and it looks as if we must save ourselves by getting out of Katkoff's sinking ship!"

"Good! I'll be there!" said the saturnine von Geist, as he strolled away, with an unaffected agitation upon

his face. "Damn the woman!" he cried, after a last vain inquiry. "She may now be busied in undermining me with Katkoff. She can be desperate enough!"

The polite *maitre d'hôtel* had seen no sign of *Madame la Comtesse Pulawy*.

When the Ritter von Geist reached the Citadel he found that the Governor-General had just driven away in his carriage with the Graf Casimir Pulawy.

"The Prince dines at Datcha Skobelev!" said Katkoff's valet, in return for a hundred-rouble note tossed him by the black-browed Master of Weissenstein. "I am to send his carriage there at eight to-morrow! There is to be a supper party!" he volubly added.

But the schemer was already striding away.

"Just the game to suit me!" muttered von Geist. "I will face this icy-pulsed Swede to-night! If her stubborn nature does not yield, I can take the four o'clock train for St. Petersburg.

"They will all be at sea until I return. I can turn the whole facts over to Melikoff! Gorski will be telegraphed for, and when I return, it will be with full powers, and the whole account shall be settled at once!

"For Loris Melikoff shall know that Prince Katkoff has let Max von Dornberg slip through his fingers through the treachery of this Polish serpent, who sold him out—as well as Russia—for the bribe of a young lover's flattery!

"And—then—Marie drifts helpless into my arms. She shall learn to sue, for these two young women will be endangered. I have it! I will ask her if I shall tell the secret of our past life to Dragonoff and Max, her fugitive son! I can paint in the details with a free hand!" He smiled in a fancied triumph.

He strolled around to his rooms at the Cercle de Noblesse and furtively made his preparations for the hurried trip.

It was seven o'clock as he briskly sprang into his carriage and drove away to join the now vicious Gorski in a Muscovite merry-making in the proud old home of the Tête-Noires.

While they plotted over their Roederer at the table in the Villa Pulawy, the haggard old General Dragonoff gazed upon the face of Nadine Valdor.

There was a look of utter despondency upon the veteran's wrinkled visage. "If I could only have the full confidence of Marie and Zenaide—even this simple-hearted girl," he sighed. "For the enemy make no sign of what they will array against us! There is one last resort! One final appeal left!

"*The Czar!* But I must see Marie to-morrow before I meet this tiger-like Katkoff! He is busy in rolling up a mass of accusations to overwhelm us!"

The General shut himself up in the library to dream over the morrow's sorrows, when he learned that the Countess Marie was in a deep sleep of exhaustion.

By her side sat the dauntless girl who had unshrinkingly given her charge the heavy sleeping potion obtained of the complaisant Doctor Adelsdorfer.

And then, with a strange sinking of the heart, the Circassian girl watched the clock as the slow-moving hands dragged around toward midnight!

Nicolas Katkoff's flushed face beamed out over the board at that snug little lovers' retreat, the Datcha Skobelev, whence a dozen bright-eyed women returned, all unrestrained, the burning glances of their Russian cavaliers.

By his side, sat Arline Pulawy, robed in a dress of old gold, the red roses in her hair vying with the burning color of her wine-flushed face.

Her eyes, glittering and *provoquante*, never left Nicolas Katkoff's face, and she negligently fingered the rope of pearls which the princely Governor-General had hung around her neck when she had chanted his favorite Tzigane love-song.

"A deserter, a deserter!" gayly cried a pale-faced Esthonian queen as Casimir Pulawy rose to leave the supper-room. The stars were senescent now, and the breeze of night waved them to wander in the rose-shaded alleys of Datcha Skobelev.

"I leave Madame Pulawy here in gage," lightly answered the handsome Casimir. "I have to gallop in to Reval and order our carriage! I will be back here for the last dance, and so, *al rivedersi!*"

He crossed the room and laid his hand upon Arline Pulawy's rounded arm.

She looked up into his eyes with a languorous smile

of perfect content! When he had whispered a few words, she smiled upon him a faint wintry gleam. "You will report back here to the Governor-General for your duties as Master of Ceremonies! There will be valses, but *no mazurka*, till you come!"

And, standing on the threshold, a gallant and martial figure, he touched his finger-tips in a kiss to all the assembled loveliness around the table.

When the clattering hoofs of Pulawy's charger had died away in ringing echoes below the opened windows, then the beautiful human snake turned to her insensate lover. "A cup for Love!" she cried, and the rosy moments lightly fled as the lissome Lithuanian whispered words which set the Kalmuck Prince's heart aflame.

"I have something to tell you, Nicolas," she murmured, as the great dancing-room was filled with the graceful figures of the "dancers dancing in tune." "Something that you alone must hear! Take me out into the garden!"

And, leaning heavily upon his arm, the trembling-hearted Delilah piloted away the man who was now as wax in her hands!

Under the trellised roses, she murmured a story that shook his frame, as her jewelled fingers hid the diamond tears clinging to her fringing lashes.

"Let me reckon with him! I will deal with him, Arline!" fiercely growled Prince Katkoff, as he heard how von Geist had dared to aspire to the love of his nearest friend's *ame damnée*. The recital was one which called for the "code" in all its bloodiest force.

"I must not be here when it happens, Nicolas!" she pleaded. "Think of your name, your exalted station! Let me go away to Helsingfors! Give me the 'Livadia,' and Casimir will conduct me. Then you can strike, and strike him to the heart! If we are both away, no one will dare to dream that you revenge my wrongs!"

She clung to him in a seeming transport of terror.

"You are right," he sternly said. "Old Dragonoff would take advantage of it! Curse him! He is out of my control now! Listen! I will give you an order to Beberikoff, my yacht commander, to sail forthwith! Let Casimir go to him at once when your carriage returns!"

"From here, you can drive direct to the yacht, and Casimir can have all in readiness for you in an hour! Take the early morning tide! I shall sleep here. I will send for von Geist at ten o'clock to meet me out at San Brigitte. We are putting up a heavy battery there. Go to the Hôtel Kamp at Helsingfors! I will send a staff officer over there to you with letters, and then, Arline, come back to me! I will have finished my work, and no one shall be bold enough to come between us."

While the listening roses swayed to the music of the merry dancers, there was a shrouded form lurking in the trellised summer-house, far away below Villa Pulawy. The dark clumps of the cypress, pines, and leafy lindens hung black over the gravelled walks.

From below the crested bank rose the lapping of the waves on the beach and the indistinct murmur of the voices of the night.

The villa was wrapped in inky darkness, save that one feebly blinking light shone in the chamber where Marie von Dornberg lay, watched by the Circassian girl, whose horror-stricken eyes were fixed upon the dial of the gilded clock upon the mantel. The air of the sleeping-room was stifling, as the girl pushed back the heavy masses of her hair and whispered with white lips, "*It is the time!*" The very air seemed fraught with horrors.

Below her there, in Titania's garden, the heavy odors of the lilacs clung to the wreathed vines.

From off the silent sea, came the faint reflected gleam of twinkling stars, and the blue vault showed the scattered lamps of night, faint, trembling, and afar.

There was no movement in that shrouded woman's figure, crouching in a corner of the summer-house, until a heavy step crashed across the velvet sward, trampling down the *muquets* and Russian violets beneath a ruthless heel!

For one brief moment, the burly form of Karl von Geist stood motionless at the door of the pavilion, and then, with outstretched arms, he sprang forward.

"*Marie, at last!*" he tenderly whispered, as his arms closed around the shrouded form.

Something rose and fell with a dull gleam in the faint starlight! There was the sound of a heavy crash, as the lifeless body fell backward in a corner, and, with one hollow, shuddering groan, the spirit fled forever!

But, swifter than the panther in its spring, Casimir Pulawy leaped out into the inky darkness of the luxuriant foliage!

Dashing over a low hedge, he sprang upon a horse tethered there in a leafy lane, and then rode madly away down the same road toward Saint Brigitte.

He paused beside an open fosse to toss aside a woman's white head-veil and a long peasant's cloak!

Then drawing his Polish cap from his breast, he rode smartly across the sleeping town to where a wine-house still opened its hospitable doors. It was a place of general resort for reckless summer lovers.

While the Oberkellner opened a flask of champagne, Casimir, Count Pulawy strode out into the garden of the summer pleasure-resort.

With a few vigorous blows of his heel, he turned up the freshly spaded earth, and then thrust the blood-stained knife far down into the soft mould, driving it deeply down with his heel!

Then, lightly humming a Polish love-song, the sly assassin wandered back, quaffed his wine, and, tossing the servant a ten-rouble bill, carefully trimmed a cigar.

With all the gallantry of his mercurial race, he joined the merry dancers in Datcha Skobelev, a half an hour later!

And none of the happy revellers knew the burden of his careless whisper as Arline Pulawy drew him aside, her eyes gleaming with a strange new light. "Take this!" she whispered. "Be sure to have a servant with you! Use my own carriage! Go to the Hôtel Petersbourg after you have seen Beberikoff! Send the carriage back here for me! I will drive directly to the steamer. Have all my luggage taken on board. We sail at day-break. And do not lose sight of the hotel servants until you join me on the steamer!"

"Katkoff?" whispered the young *chevalier d'industrie*. "Has sent me away until he can deal with von Geist!" she faltered.

"You are a witch, Arline!" he muttered. "I understand! Stay with the Prince here, and have him put you in the carriage himself. Thus we are both accounted for—every moment!"

"Trust to me," laughed Arline. "He is waiting for

me now to bid me adieu. Say farewell to all quickly, and tell them that the Prince has sent you away!" Then, leaning over to him, she panted, "Are you sure?" She held her breath, as he answered,

"Three times to the hilt, in the back! *I even kicked the dead dog!* He moved not! and, never spoke one word!" The work had been well done, and Arline gasped, "Go, now!"

With eyes lit up with all love's enticements, Arline Pulawy joined the moody patrician who thirsted for von Geist's blood at dawn. Already he saw his foe—*à la barrière*—behind the ruined walls of San Brigitte!

"Arline," he murmured, as he threw his arms around her, "I will take you away with me to Cracow! You shall be the queen of Galicia, for I have already private intimations of my promotion!"

"You shall be the lord of my life," she murmured, "and in our old Poland you will soon learn to know what a happy woman's love is, far from these foggy shores of the country of dreary sands. I will show you the still beating heart of Poland!"

To the wailing melody of the Tzigane music they builded themselves a fool's paradise, far away from the shadow of all earthly cares! It was the conceit of two hearts strong in the lusts of Life and Love!

Far away, as the deep-toned bells of the Cathedral struck two, the Princess Zenaide leaned timidly out of her window. The dreaming gardens lay below her there, wrapped in the mystic silence of the night.

"If I only dared!" she said, but she returned to her post at the bedside of the sleeping woman.

The bell seemed to toll the knell of the dead, and, in some mysterious way, in the heart of the brave girl, entered a dread of that vengeance of Arline Pulawy—the woman at bay, whom the dead von Geist had doomed to betrayal, and to Katkoff's mad fury.

But her answer had been sealed by the cold hand of Death—sealed forevermore!

It was ten o'clock of the day, and the hull of the swift "Livadia" had already disappeared as a mere speck upon the unruffled blue waters leading to Helsingfors, when Captain Serge Lemacheffsky and Colonel Apraxine bade adieu to General Michel Dragonoff, standing in the door of the Villa Pulawy.

There was no sound in the villa, where the servants glided around with that hushed air indicating the presence of serious illness.

In the Countess Marie's rooms, the two young beauties had leaned all night over their beloved charge.

Nadine Valdor had stolen down at last to the great drawing-room, for she knew that General Dragonoff was dispatching the "Aslauga" to convey his own wife and the Bellegardes away to St. Petersburg. Colonel and Madame Maxime were also to sail in the yacht and convoy the guests to the Neva. The little circle was now armed against all attacks.

The old veteran had burned his ships behind him now. "I will have it out with them, but, I will fight him only on the steps of the throne!" he stoutly swore. "And there, the memories drifting down on the battle-smoke of Shipka, may soften the stern heart of the Czar. There is an ugly trio—Katkoff, von Geist, and this jack-booted idiot, Gorski, the hero of a thousand bits of police dirty work. A General, forsooth. A military man-miliner. Only a police popinjay!"

It had been Serge Lemacheffsky's last official duty to order a swift tug to be ready to await the returning yacht at Spint Head, and tow it up through the calms of the Gulf of Finland, past Cronstadt, to the Neva.

Dragonoff was highly pleased with his dexterity. All the family servants but Tatiana were now on board the yacht.

"They will think that we are simply going over to Helsingfors for a visit!" laughed the new Commander of the Caucasus. "But, our party will take a special train from here and be in my St. Petersburg home long before Katkoff can interfere with our movements. He never would dare to stop me in escorting these three women to Petersburg!"

Above them, in Marie von Dornberg's room, the ashen-faced Circassian now started at every sudden sound. The clang of the bells of a passing post-chaise, the cry of the itinerant Tzigane pedler, the clatter of horses' hoofs brought her to the window, gazing wistfully down into the deserted thickets of the overgrown gardens of the villa. There was no dread disclosure yet.

"He did not keep his trust!" she murmured. "And

Arline, too, is silent. There is no news from anyone. The blow is about to fall. Katkoff is only waiting for his prey."

And then, she clasped her hands to her bosom, where a little packet of papers replaced the enchanted turquoise necklace.

"It is the supreme hour!" she faltered. "I must speak soon! I will save her, even—even if I lose Serge! But he will know at last that I struck for liberty, for love, for the right! Ah, my God! Look! Nadine!"

The faint scream drew Nadine Valdor to the second window. The bosky gardens were all alive with armed men.

Grim Cossacks and nervous police, with a dozen *agents de sûreté* in plain clothes, were swarming through the deserted walks of the ten acres where Nicolas Katkoff had hidden his bird of Paradise.

"What is it?" faintly demanded Marie von Dornberg, as her feeble head fell back upon the pillow, after a vain attempt to rise from her couch.

"It is nothing, Maman, darling!" answered Nadine Valdor, her finger on her lip, as the brave Princess Zenaide descended the stair. But, there was a stern tableau below them now—a marshalling of armed men in the presence of Death!

On the threshold of the Villa Pulawy, stood Michel Dragonoff, his eyes ablaze, confronting Prince Nicolas Katkoff, who was surrounded with a dozen staff officers.

"What do you here?" angrily demanded the old veteran, as Serge Lemacheffsky glided to the side of the Princess Zenaide.

"I come to seek the Ritter von Geist," gravely answered Katkoff. "He was seen to enter these grounds at midnight, last night."

"By whom?" shouted Dragonoff.

"By his own secret agents, posted to watch the conspirators harbored in this dwelling!" fiercely replied the Governor-General. "I demand admittance in the name of the law! *In the name of the Czar!*" He turned to the officers at his side and beckoned them on.

"Coward!" hissed Dragonoff, as he sprang toward the heavy-eyed tyrant, but the fearless Colonel Apraxine stepped between them. His warning finger was now raised. And even Katkoff hesitated!

For a dozen men were now bearing a stiffened body along the gravelled walk, whose pebbles crunched beneath their heavy tread. "There is your dead spy!" harshly cried Apraxine. "Perhaps some of his love-errands at your bidding have gained him his just reward!"

All eyes were now fixed upon the ghastly burden lying there before them.

General Gorski stepped out from the throng and lifted a stiffened arm, which fell back with a sullen thud, when the startled Police Chief dropped the dead man's hand. His eyes silently asked the question: "Who slew this man?"

"Stabbed three times in the back. We found no knife," said an agent, "and no signs of a struggle. He was lying in a corner of the summer-house. There was not even a single drop of blood. He must have bled internally and died instantly. He has surely been dead for some hours." And all the soldiers familiar with death could easily confirm this view of the mystery.

A gleam of vicious triumph shone out on Nicolas Katkoff's cruel face. "It is the body of the Ritter Karl von Geist, the Lord of Weissenstein, and I shall detain everyone in the house to answer for his death!" hoarsely cried the Governor-General.

The crowd surged back, for a white-robed figure then appeared at the open door.

It was the pale apparition of Marie von Dornberg, who faced the victorious Katkoff.

"There lies the corpse of Serge Maximoff," she solemnly said, "alias, the Ritter von Geist! Loris Melikoff's paid police *mouchard*, your supposed dupe; your secret master, the vile thing who was plotting your own ruin!

"Who dares to deny that every door to this house was watched last night by his spies? No one left the mansion. Not a human being stirred. You were foolishly confident! Your trap was only too well set. If they had, your secret agents would have surely arrested them. I am a sovereign manor-holder of the Baltic. I defy you or your police! Take away your dead carrion! Dare even you speak his real name? I will!

"*Serge Maximoff, the disguised agent of the Third Section!*"

The Lady of the Isles turned in scorn, and then, with a majestic step, she ascended the stair to where the trembling Baroness Valdor awaited her at the head, with Tatiana, now bathed in tears.

"It is false!" raged Katkoff, moving toward the open door.

At its threshold, General Dragonoff, his silver hair fluttering in the breeze, stood like a lion in his path.

"Not one step further! Over my dead body only do you enter here!"

At his side, stood Colonel Apraxine, and in front of the fearless old man, was Serge Lemacheffsky, sword in hand, his face lit up with the light of battle.

"Perhaps the Graf in Pulawy," he sneered, "or that Polish renegade Casimir, your Figaro, could tell you how this man died!" sneered Lemacheffsky.

"Are you mad to force an entrance here? I am relieved from duty in your province, and even you dare not butcher a Colonel of the Guards!"

"You are under arrest!" shouted Katkoff, as he turned to General Gorski. "Confine that man!"

"Bah!" laughed Serge Lemacheffsky. "You dare not hinder the Czar's orders! I shall report by telegraph your madness. Colonel Apraxine will do the same."

General Gorski drew Apraxine and Lemacheffsky aside as the two irate patricians were left standing facing each other, with the dead body lying prone on the broad portico at their feet.

In the doorway, now, the brave Circassian girl was standing, her arms crossed upon her bosom.

"Be reasonable, Lemacheffsky!" entreated Gorski, as, with a wave of his hand, he bade all the underlings retire.

"Countess Pulawy and the Graf Casimir were both at our supper last night, at the Datcha Skobelev, and they left to-day, under escort, to visit Helsingfors on the 'Livadia.' They will be both astounded at this sad news. Let me reason with these excited gentlemen. There is some frightful mystery here!" The cold perspiration beaded Gorski's brow as he led the irate Prince Nicolas Katkoff aside. For, he saw his house of cards all lying scattered around him.

"Can you not see that the game is in their hands now?" the Police General secretly urged. "Our witnesses are all dead. There is an ominous succession here.

"First, Olga Luboff; second, poor Lazareff; and now, my closest friend, von Geist! This is no work of mere tyros.

"This is surely the revenge of the desperate Brotherhood of the East. You have gone too far with General Dragonoff. *No man can undermine him with the Czar!* You and I may be marked for the next victims!

"Let the whole affair drop here!

"Melikoff and the Interior office will at once decree Max von Dornberg a fugitive criminal. But he is not the heir of his mother's sovereignty. It dies with her, but she can sell the property to whom she pleases. *Remember that!* We need the Island of Worms for our new fortification project." And then Katkoff started.

"As for revenging von Geist," he whispered, "you dare not publish to the world that the dead man was really only Serge Maximoff, a high officer of the Secret Police, for many years on foreign duty.

"You cannot admit that he crept into this young fool's intimacy, and that the domain of Weissenstein was only loaned him for the purposes of the Third Section. It would be too awkward for all of us!

"Besides, these two Polish adventurers are safe now over at Helsingfors. The woman could betray you to your enemies, and the man would sell his God, his country, you, and the woman of his own blood, out to anyone for gold. Remember, you cannot seize them in Finland!

"Dare you face their story if Dragonoff should choose to buy them? They are in a province now, where they are perfectly free, under the Finnish privileges. They even need no passports whatever to leave Finland. I happen to know that this von Geist simply made a tool of Casimir Pulawy. You appointed that renegade Chief of Police of Weissenstein, and you cannot now undo your own work. You dare not face all this before Boris Melikoff's cunning Armenian eyes!" The fool was uttering, for once, a cunning wisdom.

"Take the body into the house!" gloomily said Prince Katkoff. "It is under my official control. I will retire

to the Citadel; you can then bring General Dragonoff and his staff to me this afternoon. He shall have no hindrance. I will simply drop the whole matter, send the papers up to Melikoff, and then let the actual Dictator punish these rebels, or continue the work of beating down the Oestland nobles, as he chooses."

And then, the Governor-General stalked out on the lawn, as General Gorski bade his attendants lift up the body.

They were already at the doorway, when Serge Lemacheffsky sprang into its arch, revolver in hand. A fearless look shone out in his brave eyes.

"Back!" he cried. "The woman who is to be my wife is only waiting now to leave this accursed den forever. Keep your carrion out until we are gone! I'll scatter the brains of the first man who stirs a foot!"

At the bidding of Gorski, the bearers toiled down the driveway to the front gate, where a common khibitka received the remains of the Master of Weissenstein.

Serge Lemacheffsky sheathed his revolver and then dropped its plaited cord. He leaned down to the Princess Zenaide, whose eyes were flaming with some mighty access of her untamable royal recklessness.

Striding lightly across the lawn, he doffed his turban before the silent Governor-General, who saw too late the fatal madness of sending the two Poles away under an almost Imperial sanction. They were free as air now, and the unspoken word chilled his marrow.

"You are a brave man, mon Prince," gravely said Lemacheffsky. "You wear a sword; so do I, and my blood makes me your equal! I beg you to come into the drawing-room, and to bring General Gorski with you. The Princess Zenaide is a ward of the Czar, a royal captive. The honor of the Imperial Government is pledged for her care and maintenance. There will be only present General Dragonoff and the Countess von Dornberg, with myself, when the Princess Zenaide shows you the abyss before you. For from your presence we go to appeal to the Czar, direct!"

It was a strange coterie which soon gathered around the eagle-eyed Circassian, as, without a word of comment, she read to the assembled parties in interest the fatal note of von Geist, dropped by the doomed Olga.

Luboff, then the letter of the dead schemer luring Max von Dornberg to the Bathing Pavilion, and lastly the confession of Olga Luboff written in her own trembling hand.

Not a word was spoken as the hawk-eyed Circassian turned and motioned to Tatiana, hovering in the near distance.

With downcast eyes, the Baroness Nadine Valdor then entered the room. In a ringing voice, the Princess Zenaïde bade her tell the story of the dropped letter and the fatal decoy note.

Prince Katkoff lifted his haggard face, but General Gorski had already stolen out of the room. "How was this confession obtained from Olga Luboff?" demanded the Governor-General, reaching out a strong hand for the papers; but Lemacheffsky only grimly laughed, as he folded them up and thrust them into his breast, under his great white cross.

"The rest I will only tell to the Czar *himself*," proudly cried Zenaïde, as she sprang to her feet. "And, you dare not press any further inquiry now, unless you seek your own ruin!"

"Go and ask your clumsy police spy, General Gorski, for whose love my unfaithful companion died! Dare you publish the shame of the Czar—that I, a poor, friendless girl, have been dogged from the Catherine Institute to my betrayal? Coward!"

When Katkoff sprang to his feet the three women had left the men alone. The helpless Governor-General saw only averted faces now.

"Send me Colonel Apraxine to the Citadel to arrange for your departure with all your train and the families connected with you," stubbornly cried Prince Katkoff. "I have dropped this whole affair. I wash my hands of it, and Gorski can answer for the whole thing to St. Petersburg!"

And then, Michel Dragonoff drew himself up to his full height, as he thundered: "By God! *Apraxine shall not stir a step!* He leaves here only on my orders. If you are not a coward, send me your seconds! But hold! not till I have dealt with you and Gorski before General Loris Melikoff himself!"

"It is a fight in the open now. *I defy you!* You have

disgraced your uniform! If, as you say, this den is under your control, then know it will be vacant in three hours. I shall be at the Hôtel Petersbourg until I leave Reval.

"The 'Aslauga' will bear my *laissez passer* as far as Hapsal and St. Petersburg.

"For your armed occupation of the Island of Worms you shall lose your place. I swear it by the bones of Vladimir Monomach!"

"Come on, Colonel!" cried Dragonoff. "We have our own departure to arrange for. Go to the station and command me a special train ready to leave in six hours. And when you and Apraxine have dispatched the 'Aslauga,' join me at the Hôtel Petersbourg.

"Your servants and mine can wait and send on all the luggage. Send me your orderly back here at once, with a telegraph clerk."

Out on the lawn, the Governor-General called General Gorski to his side. "*You fool!*" he roared. "You have lost your grade in your blundering seizure of the Island. Get back there, release it, report the fact to me by telegraph, and then await your own responsibility at Hapsal!"

And then, the worm turned at last!

"Shall I recognize Casimir Pulawy as the Chief of Police of Weissenstein any longer?" he sneered. The ardent princely lover turned pale. "See here! Don't be a fool, Gorski!" he cried. "Telegraph to Hapsal and withdraw the garrison and all agents from the Island. Come with me! I will send you home by Weissenstein, and give you an officer to take possession in the name of the Crown and—a new Chief of Police!"

When the sun sank in the west, its last gleams shone out upon the silver sails of the "Aslauga," dashing bravely on toward Hapsal, under the command of Colonel Apraxine.

The train bearing the now desperate General Dragonoff and the three ladies was well on its way to St. Petersburg. The old soldier was nursing his wrath alone when the Princess Zenaide glided to his side.

"There is nothing left to do now, dear General," she softly said, "but to make the best terms we can for Max. As for this canaille back there, they will never

call up the past. They will be only too quick to destroy all that menaces Marie, Nadine, and myself, but for Max you alone must plead. His flight cannot be explained, even by us. For everywhere, flight is confession."

"Tell me," cried the grateful Dragonoff, "how did you obtain that written declaration of this woman Olga?"

The beautiful Circassian stood before him, pale, trembling, silent. But at last, as the tears fell through her veiling fingers, she murmured: "For the sake of the mother who bore you, never ask me! And Serge—my God! He must not know!"

She fell into the arms of the poor old veteran, who sobbed: "My child! My poor child!" for, the grim truth had flashed upon him at last!

It was a month after the obscure burial of Serge Maximoff that a veiled woman of the most exquisite symmetry demanded an audience with the Princess Zenaïde, in General Dragonoff's superb town-house on the Moïka, in St. Petersburg. The October winds were already stripping the brown leaves from the trees in the gardens of the Winter Palace, and long lines of barges were being towed up the Neva to Lake Ladoga to escape the dreaded icy grip of King Winter.

In the Dragonoff household, all was now confusion, for the flitting to Tiflis was to immediately follow the departure of the stern-faced veteran.

There was a little war-cloud lowering over the Persian frontier, and the rebellious Circassians still grumbled restively, though the Russian flag had gone on to Batoum, Kars, and Baku.

General Dragonoff, Colonel Apraxine, and the radiant young Colonel Serge Lemacheffsky were all ordered to the front, with the General's staff, and a steady old officer unwillingly lingered to bring on the ladies of the military households of the régime at Tiflis.

While Apraxine and Lemacheffsky were hurrying forward matters of moment, Michel Dragonoff was absent upon an errand which taxed all his fortitude.

All the circle in the Dragonoff household knew that the long persecution of the Countess von Dornberg was at an end. The de Bellegardes, too, were housed under

the hospitable roof on the Moika, where Excellence Dragonoff anxiously watched her guests from the debatable Island Kingdom.

It was a matter of universal comment that the haughty Prince Katkoff had been suddenly transferred to Cracow; that General Gorski had been detailed for a ten-years' tour of duty with the Siberian Battalions; and that a brooding quiet now reigned over the Oestland, where the sullen, defiant noblesse, herding only with each other, guarded every secret of the defunct Brotherhood of the East.

In an unmarked grave, under the alleys of Weissenstein, slept the baffled man whose ablest schemes had come to naught, and the painted glories of the silent banquet-halls looked down upon vacant chairs at the deserted tables where the light-hearted summer lovers once had gathered.

There was no light-footed beauty stealing out of the state-chambers now to peer wistfully toward the Hunters' Lodge to note the signal which told a stormy-hearted woman of Max von Dornberg's coming!

For, on distant shores, that reckless young noble still wandered waiting until his conscience-stricken mother could achieve his pardon! No one knew of the silent agony of her soul as Marie von Dornberg, gazing out on the canal of the Moika, wondered if peace would meet her under its dark waters! She was now almost desperate!

"I dare not tell my son the story of my earlier life!" she murmured, "for he could never believe me innocent!" The last of the von Ehrensteins saw her Island Kingdom doomed! There was but one road to Max's rehabilitation. It was a pardon in the name of the Czar! And, but one man might dare to ask for it—General Dragonoff!

True, the first stormy interview of the devoted Dragonoff with General Loris Melikoff had ended in a complete erasure of all the laborious *procès* toilsomely concocted by the clerks who furthered Katkoff's and Gorski's schemes.

"The dead tell no tales," growled Melikoff. "These three women of rank are to be held harmless, General! Your well known loyalty absolves your ward, the girlish

Baroness Valdor! The Imperial Government is also charged with that troublesome young beauty, the Princess Zenaide!

"She is a law unto herself, and so, *hors de règle!* If you knew the Circassians as I do, but," he grimly added, "you will know more of their fascinating charms and daring duplicity before you return! Thank Heaven for the snows upon your head, they will guard your heart!

"But, as for Max von Dornberg, a reckless recalcitrant Swedish noble, a daring rebel *in posse*, I wash my hands of him!

"Time will forfeit his mother's sovereign rights! And, she must pay the full penalty for his madness! I can see that you do not know the whole story, and, from what I know of women, you never will! There is but one course open for von Dornberg!

"To treat with the Czar—through you; and I advise you to throw yourself upon the generosity of the Czarewitch! Make the best terms you can! For you cannot turn back when once you set your face toward the prison gate! *Russia must go on!*"

It had been only after long deliberation with Marie von Dornberg, that Michel Dragonoff departed to throw himself upon the generosity of the Grand Duke, who, as the heir of the Russian crown, had been informed by the artful Armenian Dictator, Loris Melikoff, of the situation of the Island Kingdom.

St. Petersburg was now shuddering under some fresh attempts upon the life of the aged Czar, and it was a most unpropitious time for clemency—the black shadow of Death hovering over all. The court was torn into factions over the growing ascendancy of the bewitching Princess Dolgorouki, upon whose brow her infatuated senile admirer was plotting to place the tiara of a Czarina!

When the Princess Zenaide entered the reception-room she knew at once that the strange waif of fortune who ruled Nicolas Katkoff's heart had sought her out for a final farewell. It was indeed Arline Pulawy standing there, her bosom heaving in a strange emotion.

The veil was lifted for a moment, and then, with a fearful glance at the doors, the Polish enchantress told her brief story.

"I go away with him to Cracow! Casimir has left Russia forever! Katkoff knows now that Casimir killed von Geist! The brute would have betrayed me to Katkoff! He bade me spy upon you all, and sell you to shame and ruin, that he might supplant Katkoff!

"I lied to Nicolas Katkoff, and told him that Casimir only struck home for revenge for brutalities to me, and so, the past is all secure!

"There is but one thing more: you are safe, for only Nicolas Katkoff is responsible for von Geist's death. He used an abler man as a tool, and he knows now that only Casimir's dagger prevented von Geist from supplanting him.

"The whole scheme of that dead dog was to force the Countess von Dornberg into his arms. And Max must never know—Marie von Dornberg, too, must never know—that I made myself a murderess in heart to save her, for the sake of the man I loved! I go back to Poland, but only to reign as a queen in shadow-land. Nicolas Katkoff can never be officially slighted.

"His hand has struck too often, too deeply, for the Czar—for Russia—for that propaganda which will shrivel up all the smaller dependencies into the one scroll of the relentless Russian system!

"I know the whole plan for effecting the downfall of the Oestland noblesse. Let Countess Marie yield, mediatize, and so save her son, in giving up her sovereignty. Her rights will be all considered. I have come at the risk of my life, even, for Katkoff is a mad brute, though my slave, to tell you this. My very existence is in your hands. And I have given myself, for life, to Katkoff!"

"Why?" murmured the Princess Zenaide, gazing at the woman shaken by a wild storm of sorrow.

"Because I know how that dauntless girl, Nadine Valdor, risked her life, her very name, her unspotted maiden honor, to save von Dornberg. He has the royal gift of reaching women's hearts.

"Tell him to see the angel at his side, and to forget the woman who loved him more than her own life! To bring him at last to the arms of the innocent woman who loves him, I go—where I go!

"Ah, my God! The old, heartless French proverb

is true—‘There is necessary to every man two women—the one whom he loves, and the one who loves him!’ I have paid my whole debt to womanhood, my heavy debt, in saving Max’s mother, for his sake, for the sake of Nadine Valdor, for the sake of the love I bore him!

“And remember, I was set on to lure him to his ruin by that fiend! Von Geist would have also dragged the Countess down. For she was the slave of her own strong will, and he came, knelt at her feet, and deceived her. He lured her unwittingly almost to her ruin. Tell her the words that I overheard are sealed in my breast.

“And now, I go away forever! I shall know of you, all your happiness, for Katkoff is yet fearful enough to watch you all.

“To you, in your mountains, wedded to the man of your choice, your first love, daughter of the wild Tcherkess, I give my unworthy blessing. I crave but one boon. You know it. Nadine Valdor must never know but that she holds her husband’s whole heart!

“As for him, I know that he will not forget me!” she said, with a sad pride. “There were hours which will haunt him to his dying day. And those hours were mine, for I was then, in truth, loving and beloved!

“It is a woman’s whole history to say, ‘*I have been loved!*’”

And then, Arline, the strange Polish waif, threw back her veil.

“Look into my eyes, my brave Tcherkess Princess. You can see that I have spoken only the truth!” With a swift step, she glided out of the room, and when the Circassian girl would have stayed her, there was nothing but the rustle of a flying footstep upon the stair.

In the presence of the grave, bearded Czarewitch, with restrained emotion, General Dragonoff told the story of the little Island Kingdom.

The heir to Russia’s crown listened while the veteran recalled gallant figures of the shadowy past.

The great Jacob de Gardie, Lord of Hapsal, and his haughty heir by marriage, the gallant Count Otto William Konigsmark, son-in-law to the man who held the Oestland for Sweden, himself the Generalissimo of the Venetians.

How the radiant Aurore von Konigsmark enslaved the mighty Augustus of Poland and Saxony, and how

the love-blossom grown in lofty Moritzberg, became the invincible Maurice de Saxe, Field Marshal of France, for whose reckless love, the peerless Adrienne Lecouvreur lost her life.

The Czar's son listened to the story of how a von Ehrenstein sought out Maurice de Saxe, in the splendors of far away Paris, crossing the frozen sound, from the Island Kingdom, on the winter ice, and bought the fief with all its sovereign rights, from the man who had grown to be Duke of Courland and the first General of the age.

The man for whose hand, even a Russian Archduchess pined in hopeless love, and who joined the infinite arts of his lovely and deserted mother, to the wild strength and cunning sagacity of Augustus der Starke.

Dragonoff traced the line of the Island queen down through all the wild episodes of the *Guerre du Nord*, and then, paused, in a last appeal for pardon, for the heir of the von Ehrensteins and the soldierly von Dornbergs!

"There is nothing yet proven against him, your Imperial Highness," cried the old soldier. "A gallant noble, his mother my co-trustee, he will soon marry the lovely Baroness Valdor, and a few years, will make him a firm adherent of the Russian crown! He was practised on in his youthful heedlessness by the dead schemer."

"Spare me these details, General," said the man destined to be Russia's only blameless Czar, the man over whose lofty head hung even now the shadow of his father's impending murder, a crown of sorrow.

"Your gallant soul has been poured out for these people! *You do not know the whole story!* I may not know all, but, *I know more than you do!* The Czar has graciously granted your prayer for the marriage of the Princess Zenaide with the gallant Colonel Lemacheffsky, for that union will go far to tranquillize this tameless young Tcherkess, and we are pleased to have the Princess return and live in due state and splendor, among her own people.

"But, in this other case, I will lay down the conditions—the only conditions of pardon! That the Count von Dornberg shall remain absent from Russia for four

years! That he shall keep himself always in good report with the local Russian Ambassador!

"His marriage to the Baroness Valdor would not be seriously opposed. She will tie his Swedish recklessness down to a loyal Russian nature! But, as to the Island of Worms, we will appoint a commission of three to value the fief! Let de Bellegarde, a kinsman of the Countess, be one. The Czar will then appoint two of our ablest men, both rich and of the highest character, and not bureau officers. Neither of them to be Oestlanders. When the whole commission shall agree upon a lump sum—say not less than four millions of roubles—the Countess shall then sell the island, directly to the Russian crown, retaining all her hereditary rank and titles, and all her personal possessions! A full and unconditional pardon is only to be granted when the transfer of this unlucky island has been made. She, of course, retains all her other properties, and Count Max is to inherit all the von Dornberg estates, without trouble!"

"May it please your Imperial Highness," pleaded the stout-hearted veteran. "The lovely Baroness Valdor must not be placed in the ignominy of being united in marriage to a fugitive, an illegal man, a man without passports, a man under the ban! Soften this one hard condition your Highness! Deign to make the pardon absolute, upon the acceptance of the commission! And then, I can give the girl who is my ward at once in honor to her lover! The Countess will accept, and the Crown will extinguish honorably the last independent holding on the Baltic coast! I will answer for the conduct of the young couple. Remember the value of the Island Kingdom!"

"*It is forfeit already,*" stubbornly said the Czarewitch, his manly face settling into its well-known expression of dogged resolution—an expression which all men feared, and justly so. And then, the old soldier knew that the fates were against him! He clutched at his breast, and cried in a choking voice:

"These are the scars of Shipka! *They should not plead in vain!*"

For a moment, Alexander Alexandrovitch stood irresolute, with a clouded brow. and then he held out his hand. "You old fire-cater!" the Grand Duke good-

humoredly said. "You will have your way, as you had it with Suleiman Pasha! Be it as you wish!

"Let the Countess von Dornberg at once sign the agreement for the sale, under this Commission.

"Then, she can go away to her villa at Nice, and meet her young scapegrace. It will hasten you off to your grave duties in the Caucasus.

"I expect much in settling this matter from de Bellegarde's well-known loyalty. He is her kinsman, and so we will regard all as closed up. The pardon shall be sent to you forthwith!

"You do not know how far the clemency of the Czar has been stretched by me in the matter, for there has been a loving bit of hoodwinking carried on around you to save this wild young Swede.

"Allons! It is ended! You are a true and loyal friend!" And, grateful tears shone out in the old soldier's eyes as he hastened away to gladden Marie von Dornberg's heart.

It was a year later, that Max and Nadine walked, side by side, where the murmuring waves of the blue Mediterranean lapped the crags below Cap St. Martin.

The silver moon gleamed down upon the ashen gray olive-groves, and lit up the dark clumps of ilex and cypress.

Far out on the blue expanse were ghostly silver sails drifting as the fair moon drew the murmuring main. Max von Dornberg turned to Nadine Valdor whose eyes were now downcast! It was a witching hour of Love!

"You are to leave us soon," he slowly said, as he closely regarded the graceful figure of "*la belle Russe*," the woman for whose hand, many sighing gallants had already pleaded in vain. The stately villa life of the Countess von Dornberg had drawn around her a social court of the "*jeunes premiers*" of the Riviera. And Nadine's vast wealth had been heralded afar.

Nadine seated herself upon a rock and gazed out over the swelling flood. She murmured, "There is always Zenaide and Serge, who now demand the fulfilment of my promise to visit them! Their castle is the most romantic haunt of the Daghestan hills, and Serge is soon to be made a General.

"Dear old Dragonoff too, would see me again before he finally retires.

"He wishes to show me all his Tiflis court in its full official splendor! And, I think, that I must go soon, very soon!"

"My mother," brokenly said Max von Dornberg, as he seated himself at the girl's side, and took her gentle unresisting hand in his own. It was a lover's crafty method of slow approaches.

"You know her, Max! She will never change! Her heart is open to me! She is shadowed by the past, all those fearful days. You cannot know all that she has suffered, and I would leave her at once but that sorrow has brought us so closely together, that I fear to break the chain that binds her to me. Those first happy days at Hapsal come back to me now! The dear old island with its shifting fog shapes, its wild storms, its splendor of woods, and its wealth of sculptured shores. I must go, and yet, for her sake, I would stay!"

The beautiful young Baroness turned her head away, for these were memories which brought the mist of past sorrows now to cloud her bright face.

"Nadine!" cried Max. "I have held my peace in all this year! Why, you know not! You never will! But to-night, I can only see the dear face that looked up at me as the wild storm tossed our little craft in the grasp of the mighty waves.

"If I see the angel at my side, *now*, will she abide when I ask the woman who saved my life to be the guiding star to lead me on, into a nobler manhood! The de Bellegardes are coming soon! Let us wait for them, and, then, go to the Caucasus together.

"The Count brings back with him the final report of the Commission, and the three crowns and falcon will never fly again over the little Kingdom! The Island belongs, now, to the Czar.

"I am asked to take a foreign place, at Stockholm.

"Should I accept, we will go from the Caucasus to St. Petersburg, and you shall know me no longer, as a wanderer from my country.

"For, none may resist the mills of the gods! As for Russia, the whole is greater than any of its parts! It rests with you to decide if I serve the Czar! You have saved my life! *What will you do with me now?*" And then, the angel at his side looked up and he read the answer in her loving eyes!

They wandered back, hand in hand, to where the stately Countess Marie von Dornberg sat watching for their return.

There was no word spoken, but Nadine Valdor sought the shelter of a bosom thrilled with the happiness shining in the fair young girl's eyes.

That night, Max von Dornberg paced his room in a strange unrest. He had secretly learned, three months before, of the death of the high and mighty Prince Nicolas Katkoff, who had left all his vast possessions to the woman whom the world had never seen, while she queened it, in an old royal château, near Cracow.

It was an old palace whose halls had re-echoed the tread of Polish Kings.

And, the letter which he held in his hand, bore the traces of a woman's bitterest tears. He read once more its hopeless words, and then, his heart called up the lonely woman at the Château Lazienki.

He lingered as his heart beat the knell of an old love, now lost for ever. Her words recalled the Arline who had made the woods of Weissenstein, the boundary of a later Paradise!

For, she had thrust his love away forever, though with a breaking heart, in these words:

"At last I am alone, and with my first returning thoughts and peace of mind, my heart's best feelings turn to you! I was suffering in soul and spirit for you, as I felt, in sympathy, the sacrifice and agony of your dear heart.

"I felt that I ought to console you with some kind words, and yet, I feared only to make the wounds in your heart bleed still more, by reminding you of my unworthy self.

"I was in hopes that you could somewhat forget the pain I had caused you, because I feel myself, what a void there is in my existence.

"Once that I had made up my mind to part from that which was dear beyond life to me, that which might have filled the vacancy in my heart, and helped to adorn the long and wearying path, which I must now continue to the end I could not change!

"For, I dared not burden my soul with this sweet weight any longer, and, when I realized how you were

also suffering under the strain of that false position, it seemed to me that I had better die than go on torturing you thus!

"And so, I brought death into life through the sacrifice I dreaded to make, and, I decided to force you to do the same!

"You bore your trial with manliness, and I can now only thank you for helping me! Let me live, in thought, in your memory, Max, to be your guardian angel, always at your side, to shelter you from all sorrow and trouble! Do not try to forget me, for I am still woman enough to know that you *cannot*!

"All the fates were against our union! My heart bled when I saw you suffered so cruelly. You know I loved you more than my life, and yet, there was no cure but our final parting! Think of me as when you met me first at Weissenstein, when our hearts beat against each other!

"It is thus that I ask you to love and think of me, and I am sure it will bring more happiness and consolation to your soul. And, if there is a world beyond the shores of time, a world where Love lives proof against change or the storms of Fate, in that world, you will be my own, my very own!

"Loyal à la mort,

"Your ARLINE."

He looked upon the treasured lines, for the last time, as they shrivelled up in the crackling flame, and then bowed his head upon his hands!

And thus, on this night, when his eyes were opened to the angel at his side, he bade a last farewell to the mad love which had taken him across dreary Galicia to risk his life to see once more the Polish enchantress of Weissenstein.

"Poor Arline," he murmured. "Driven across the waves of Life by the storms of Fate! *Will she forget?*"

And, he never knew the worth of that strong soul which had shut him out of the Fool's Paradise, which he had builded in his wild passion to link his fate, at last, with the one who had taught her timid soul to brave every danger, to save him, by Hapsal's shores.

THE END.

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